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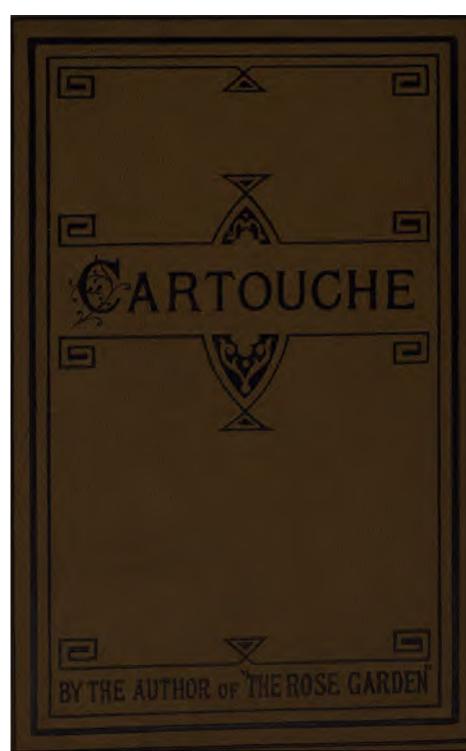
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## CARTOUCHE

FIRST VOLUME

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# CARTOUCHE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE ROSE GARDEN' 'UNAWARES' &c.

'ONLY A DOG'

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.



LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1878

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## CARTOUCHE.

## CHAPTER I.

LOVE ME, LOVE MY DOG.

## 'CARTOUCHE! Cartouche!'

The call came from a young Englishman, who, having just walked through the streets of Florence on his way from the station, now found himself before a small house which stood not far from the Cascine in an open space, pleasantly planted with trees, and within view of the Arno. The house itself was white, if so cold a colour may be taken to represent that mellow and golden effect which quickly enriches the plaster of Italy;

and it was gay with green shutters and striped awnings, for it was yet early autumn, and the City of Flowers had not long cooled down from the extreme heats which make it unbearable in summer. There was still a hot and languid glow lying on the violettinted hills which on either side surround the plain; still the Lung' Arno was avoided, and people kept close under the shadows of the narrow streets; or, if they must needs cross the river, crossed it by the Ponte Vecchio, under the shelter of its quaint old shops.

The door of the house at which the young man had arrived was open, but his call having produced no effect, instead of entering he stood still and repeated it.

## 'Cartouche!'

This time there was a dull thud on the ground to his right; a great black poodle had jumped from an upper window, and

recovering himself in a moment, broke into the most extravagant demonstrations of welcome, leaping upon the new-comer, barking and rushing about with every hair flying out from his body. The young man, who was fair and curly-haired, and tall, though inclined to stoop, looked at the window and then at the dog, and gave a whistle of surprise.

'Let me advise you not to try that too often, my friend,' he said seriously. 'It is just as well for you that the house is not a trifle higher, as I presume you would not have taken the difference into your calculations. And a nice time your mistress must be having, if these are the ways in which you indulge.'

The dog's answer was a vigorous bound, which almost upset the young man's balance; then rushing wildly round and round the open place under the plane trees, his black hair

streaming in the wind, he suddenly pulled himself up and stood watching his friend, his head on one side, his small eyes gleaming from a dishevelled tangle, and his long tongue hanging out of his mouth.

'Yes,' said the tall Englishman, still regarding him meditatively, 'I understand what all that means, old fellow. You have a good supply of animal spirits, and a difficulty in working off the steam under present circumstances. I don't know that I feel as sympathetic as you have a right to expect, but, at any rate, I shall be able to do something for you, and if you could contrive to make over a little of what is really inconveniencing you, I have not the slightest objection to be troubled with it. Where is your mistress?

As he spoke he turned towards the door and went in The house seemed to have fallen by accident among all the great buildings of Florence: it had no porter, no staircase with flats going on and on; it had been built or altered by some Englishman, who had a fancy for a home that should be like England, although the beautiful Italian skies were overhead; and Jack Ibbetson, when he came out with his aunt, Miss Cartwright, to look for a house, fell upon this place, and did not rest until he got hold of it for her. Inside the door there were flowers; a few steps led into a passage which turned off at right angles, and then Ibbetson opened the door of a small salon, and walked through it towards the window, while his eye took in certain evidences that Cartouche had been holding high revel there to the detriment of cushions and covers.

'So you still go on the rampage, old fellow?' he said to the dog, who kept close to his heels in a state of suppressed excitement. 'If I were you I would leave off this style of thing, I really would. It is nothing short of tyrannyon your part. Hallo! what's up now?'

For with a wild swoop Cartouche pounced into a corner, dragged out a basket, rushed to the window, and in a moment more was careering round and round the little garden in which the proprietor had indulged his English tastes. It was an odd little garden, with a wall round it, and a poor pretence at English grass, but the wall had capers and pretty hanging things growing out of it, and lizards darting up and down; and the beauty of the garden lay in its great flowering shrubs, in the magnolias, just beginning to show scarlet flames of seed among their glossy leaves, in the bright green of an orange tree and the broad ribbed foliage of Japanese medlars. That some one was sitting there became evident in another moment, when

there were uttered a series of appeals in a feminine voice—

'Cartouche, Cartouche! Oh, Cartouche, how can you! Come here, you naughty, naughty dog! I shall be obliged to beat you, you know I shall! Come, now, like a good dog. Cartouche, Cartouche, come here!'

The young Englishman, standing back at the window, smiled at the little scene, at the pretty soft little lady who had got up anxiously and left her work on the chair, at the dog's evident enjoyment, his pretence of remorse and abandonment, the slow wag of his tail as he waited for his mistress to approach, the swift rush with which he made his escape. At last, when he had drawn her to the limit of the garden, he suddenly dropped the basket, raced back to her chair, and seizing a loose tassel which she had been about to sew on to a cushion, pranced up to the young man with an air of infinite triumph.

Miss Cartwright turned round and saw her nephew emerging.

'Jack, is it you?' she cried. And then she hurried towards him with both her kind hands outstretched. 'My dear, dear boy, I can hardly believe it; this is delightful, this is why I have had no letter! Have you just come? Have you had nothing to eat? Angela shall send up something at once, and Winter shall go to Franconi's. My dear, it is so good to see you, and I was thinking of nothing but that naughty dog. What is that you are taking out of his mouth?'

'I'm afraid it's a tassel,' said Jack gravely.
'Shall I flog him?'

Miss Cartwright was one of those kind gentle people whose conscience and soft heartedness are always falling foul of each other.

'Perhaps it does not so much matter,' she said hurriedly; 'it is only the same tassel which he has torn off so often before, that I daresay he fancies he has a sort of right to it.'

- 'I'm very much afraid he is giving you no end of trouble,' said Jack remorsefully.
- 'Oh, my dear, no! He is wonderfully good, and so affectionate that sometimes it quite brings the tears into my eyes. But of course he is young, and one can't expect him to understand everything at once, can one?'
- 'That is the old story, Aunt Mary,' said Jack, smiling kindly; 'I have got too much good out of the excuse myself to begrudge it to Cartouche.'

But Miss Cartwright hardly heard his words; she was looking at him, her face full of that sweet warm happiness which often brightens lives which seem to us on-lookers grey and common-place. What do we know, after all? The passionate thrills, the great tides of emotion, which we call

happiness, are often more nearly allied to pain; true bliss creeps out from strange, unlooked-for crannies, from the unselfishness which has seemed to set it aside. Jack was struck and touched by the gladness in her face, by the peace of the little garden, its vines and its roses. He had a feeling as if it could not last, as if he himself were bringing in the element of unrest. He stopped his aunt when she was beginning to question him.

- 'You have not heard how Cartouche got at me.'
- 'No—did he know your step? Oh, my dear,' she said, pausing blankly.
  - 'Well?'
- 'I have just remembered I had shut him into an upstairs room, and the key is in my pocket.'
- 'It's quite safe, you need not feel for it,' said Jack gravely. 'The fact is, he jumped out of the window.'

- 'Oh, but I hope, I do hope you are mistaken,' said Miss Cartwright in great perturbation. 'I have always felt so safe when we have got him upstairs; it really will be serious if this is no restraint. Because, even if the windows were closed'—she stopped and looked doubtfully at Cartouche, who presented an aspect of complete indifference.
- 'He would go through them—not a doubt of it.'
- 'My dear boy, don't say such dreadful things! But then, what can we do? Never mind, I dare say he will not be naughty again,' she went on, bringing her unlimited hopefulness to bear; 'besides, it was owing to your coming so unexpectedly, and you have explained nothing as yet. I shall just go and see Winter, and tell her to get everything ready for you, and then I shall come back, and hear all that you have been doing.'

Left to himself, Ibbetson sat down on

a garden bench, and with his head sunk between his shoulders, his long legs stretched stiffly out, and his hands disposed of in his pockets, fell into a reverie, which, to judge from his looks, was not of an altogether agreeable nature. So absorbed by it was he, that Cartouche, tired of a short-lived goodness, went off to relieve his spirits by bullying the cat of the household, an animal which, having been always distinguished for a singularly placid disposition, was now rapidly acquiring the characteristics of a vixen, goaded thereto by a good-humoured but unceasing persecu-What with barks and spittings, there was noise enough to disturb a less profound meditation, but when Miss Cartwright at length came hurrying out, her nephew kept the same attitude, and was unaware of her approach. Thinking that he was asleep, she stood looking at him with a tender wistfulness in her soft eyes; for now that his face was in

repose she noticed a tired and grave expression which she fancied should not have been It was not a handsome face, for there was a greater squareness than is considered consistent with good looks, and the mouth was large. But his eyes were grey and honest, and all the features gave you a pleasant impression of openness and health which in itself was a strong attraction to less partial observers than his aunt. Nor was the partiality itself wonderful, when it was considered that she had acted as mother to Jack since the time when his own mother had died. a time so long ago that he was too small to know anything about it—or so they decided. When it happened, Miss Cartwright went to live with her brother-in-law, and to bring up lack.

She did this—the more loyally and creditably that she and her brother-in-law never got on well together. It was not that

they quarrelled, but that they had little in common. Sir John Ibbetson was a poor squire who farmed his own land, and never seemed to grow any the richer for it; perhaps the truth was, that being haunted by the impression that ill-luck dogged his footsteps, he could scarcely be induced to take any but a gloomy view of whatever concerned him. That Jack's early life was not coloured by such grim presentiments was owing to Miss Cartwright's persistent cheerfulness, which, while a perpetual trial to Sir John, made the home atmosphere healthy for the boy. people could have retained their sweet temper and interest in minor matters so thoroughly as she retained them, in spite of constant rebuffs: nor could she ever be talked into taking despairing views of Jack's juvenile naughtinesses, or into foreshadowing future disgrace from his inability or unwillingness to master the intricacies

of the Latin grammar. But perhaps her best service both to father and son was in keeping well before the boy his father's actual affection, and thus preventing Sir John's over-anxiety from alienating his son, which might have been a not unnatural result. As it was, the lad grew up high-spirited and perhaps a little wilful, but generous in his impulses, and with a sweet temper which it was difficult to ruffle. He was universally liked at Harrow and Oxford, and, like other men, got both good and bad out of his popularity; but being too lazy for hard work, only scrambled through what had to be done, and grievously disappointed his father, although the latter had never professed to look forward to better It might have been owing to this disappointment that Sir John took a step which caused the most lively amazement to Jack, Miss Cartwright, his servants, and, in a lesser degree, to the whole circle of his acquaintances. He announced his engagement to a rich widow.

When the first astonishment had been got over, nobody had a word to say against it except Jack. He disliked it so vehemently as even to surprise his aunt, who, with all her knowledge of him, was unaware how tenderly he cherished the idea—for remembrance it could scarcely be called-of his lost mother, or how much he resented a step of his father's which seemed to prove her to be forgotten. However, though the sore remained, his nature was too sweet not to suffer it to be mollified, although he entirely refused to benefit by the substantial kindnesses which his stepmother-to her credit be it spoken-would willingly have heaped upon him. It seemed, indeed, as if the necessary spur had at last touched his life. He studied for the bar more closely than he had ever done before, was constant in his

attendance at the courts, and in his letters to his aunt expressed such an eager desire for briefs, that if her disposition had not been absolutely peaceful, she might have returned to England on purpose to seek for a lawsuit. As it was, she began to develop what seemed like a sanguinary thirst for crime, reading the police reports in her English papers with less horror at the wickedness there brought to light, than anxiety that something should turn up for Jack.

Sir John's marriage had taken place nearly a year ago, and Miss Cartwright, uprooted from what had been her home for a long series of years, had, partly from old associations, partly to please Jack, and partly because an old maiden friend was bent upon the scheme, determined to make Florence her home for a time. It was the last thing anyone expected from her, but those are just the things which people do. She and

vol. 1.

Miss Preston had moved to Siena for the summer, and now had come back to the pretty home-like little house on which they had fallen. Miss Preston was the part of the arrangement against which Jack protested in vain. She was tall, hook-nosed, commanding: she did not believe in him; she set her face against weaknesses of all kinds, and considered it her mission to protect Miss Cartwright. When people's worth takes this sort of disagreeable shape, it is astonishing how much more indignation it raises amongst their neighbours than falls to the share of real sinners; and perhaps this was the tie which kept these two-unlike as they were-together. Miss Cartwright, who looked up to her friend with all her heart, was really filled with a vague and tender pity which Miss Preston never knew. It was she who was the actual protector-smoothing down, explaining, thinking no evil, and making people ashamed of their own.

Then there was Cartouche. Jack had picked him up as a puppy in the South of France, and insisted upon his aunt taking charge of him.

'He will have plenty of room here to run about and get himself tamed down a little,' he explained, 'whereas in London he would be miserable. You need not trouble yourself about him, he is clever enough to take care of himself and you into the bargain. If you don't really like him I can send him to my father's, only it struck me he would be just what you want here; what do you say about it?'

He put the question, but would perhaps have been surprised had a third person pointed out how little doubt he felt about the answer. Miss Cartwright would have looked upon herself as a barbarian if she had refused any gift offered her by Jack, and immediately set herself to apply to Cartouche

the same hopefulness which she had brought to bear upon her nephew's education. Miss Preston's wrath was great, but there was another power in the house—Winter, Miss Cartwright's maid, and Winter hated Miss Preston. Opposition, therefore, carried Winter to the side of Cartouche, and opposition forms as strong a bond as anything else.

## CHAPTER II.

#### AN AGREEMENT.

JACK's slumbers were far too sacred in the eyes of his aunt for her to think of disturbing them; she was preparing to retreat carefully, when he looked up and began to laugh.

- 'I was not asleep, I give you my word.'
- 'Oh, well, my dear,' she said, happy again now that the shade on his face was gone, 'I am sure it would not have been wonderful if you had dozed off after your journey, though I really don't know where you have dropped from; and I shall be quite glad to sit down and have a long talk, for you know there is a great deal to be told.'

'Well, yes, I suppose there is.'

But he did not seem inclined to begin, though Miss Cartwright looked wistfully at him. She said presently, with rather a quavering voice, 'There is no bad news?'

Just enough of a pause followed her question to make her heart sink, then he said quickly—

'Certainly not. What has come to you, Aunt Mary? You never used to indulge in these sort of fancies. If Cartouche makes you nervous I shall take him away. But I know what it is, Miss Preston has been scolding you for all the wickedness of the world. Even in Florence that woman is as bad as three fogs and an east wind.'

And he rattled on with more nonsense of the sort, but it was so evident that he was making talk to avoid some subject closer to each of them, that Miss Cartwright almost grew vexed.

- 'My dear,' she said, 'do leave poor Miss Preston alone.'
- 'She won't leave you alone, that is what I complain of. Come now, hasn't she got some unhappy clergyman of whom she falls foul?'
- 'Well, she did say she thought the new chaplain had too much self-possession for so young a man, and I said I did not think he was so very self-possessed, because when he makes a mistake he always coughs, which obliges one to notice it the more.'
- 'Worse and worse,' said Jack gravely; 'she's making you as severe as she is herself.'
- 'My dear, you don't really think I was unkind? I am sure I only thought what I could say for the poor young man, she seemed so annoyed about it. You don't really mean it, you are only laughing, and after all there is so much to say.'

He jumped up suddenly, and walked a

few steps away from his chair. The pretty quiet little garden was full of light and colour and keenly-edged shade; the beautiful glossy leaves stood up against the blue sky. Over the wall they could see other houses and other trees, and catch here and there a little glimpse of the opposite hill with its occasional cypresses. The great bell of the Duomo was clanging, all the glory of the day changing softly into another glory, deeper and more mysterious. Was it of all this of which Jack was thinking? Miss Cartwright followed him and laid her hand gently on his arm.

'My dear boy!' she said imploringly.

He looked round at once and laughed at her pleading face.

'Well, it's all—right, if that's what you want to know.'

'I'm engaged, yes, hard and fast. Why,' he said, with a quick anxiety in his voice,

<sup>&#</sup>x27;You---'

'what's the matter? Sit down, sit down,' he went on, dragging over a chair, and putting her into it very tenderly, for the delicate colour had quite faded out of her face. But she smiled at him the next moment.

'It is very silly of me, but I have been thinking so much about it; and somehow I fancied from your manner that things were not going straight, and I was foolishly anxious.'

'You shouldn't care so much about me,' said the young man with real remorse; 'nobody else in the world would trouble themselves as you do. I should have told you directly, if it had entered my head that you were taking it to heart like this. Let me go and get you a glass of water or salvolatile or something, you are as shaky as possible.'

But Miss Cartwright sat up cheerfully.

'It is nothing at all, Jack; I am quite well

again, and your news is the best thing for me, if I really wanted anything. Is it all settled?'

- 'Yes,' he said with a little restraint again, and pulling a magnolia leaf as he spoke. 'Phillis is at Bologna with the Leytons, we all came out together. Yes, it is true; I expected it to astonish you.'
- 'Don't tell me anything more for a minute or two,' said his aunt gently, putting up her hands; 'it is one thing on another. Phillis at Bologna? I don't quite understand.'
- 'But you like the news, don't you?' said Jack, turning suddenly on her.
- 'Like it! how could I fail? Such a good girl, and all that money, and your uncle wishing it so much. Nothing could be so desirable, only, my dear boy——'
  - 'What?' sharply.
- 'Sometimes you get odd touches of perversity, and the very fact of a thing being

quite unexceptional sets you against it. I remember it so well when you were a boy. It would have been a sad misfortune in this case, though, of course, it is too momentous a matter for me to have said much about it beforehand. I suppose that is the reason you did not know how anxious I felt, but I assure you I have scarcely thought of anything else. And Phillis is at Bologna! When do they come on?'

- 'To-morrow—Saturday. I don't exactly remember. I suppose you know the terms of the agreement?' said Jack, looking at her.
  - 'My dear!'
- 'Well, it is an agreement,' he said perversely; 'what else would you call it? I, Peter Thornton, of Hetherton Grange, in the county of Surrey, Esquire, do hereby declare you, John Francis Ibbetson, barrister—how shall I put the London lodgings, second floor,

to best advantage?—to be the heir of all my estates and properties—excluding, let us hope, his gout and his temper—on condition that you take as your wife my step-niece, Mary Phillis Grey, to have and to hold with the timber, freeholds, messuages, and other etcæteras of the said estate. If that is not an agreement, I don't know the meaning of the word.'

Miss Cartwright, leaning forward, tried to look into her nephew's face.

'My dear,' she said slowly, 'of course you are in joke, but I don't think I like to hear you talk in such a way. I should be miserable if I did not feel sure you were quite happy.'

Jack turned round and took her soft hand very kindly in his own.

'Well, then, don't be miserable,' he said lightly; 'why, you know it stands to reason that every one must be perfectly happy directly he or she is engaged to be married. What shall I do to prove my load of bliss?'

But she shook her head.

- 'I sometimes fancy it would be better if money were not mixed up with marriages at all. I don't think it was so much thought about in old days.'
  - 'It is a stronger necessity now.'
- 'Your father would willingly increase your allowance.'
- 'I don't choose to live on that woman's fortune. Aunt Mary, I thought you would be the first to congratulate me on the splendour of my prospects!'
- 'My dear, and so I do,' she said quickly, laying her hand on his shoulder; 'I do, with all my heart. If I ask these questions it is only that I care so very, very much, that I was afraid, Jack, whether you might have rushed into this without quite thinking enough beforehand. But I dare say that was only my

foolish fancy. Tell me one thing: if you had not married Phillis would your uncle have left the estates to her?'

'Not he,' said the young man, flinging a stone into the bushes where Cartouche was still annoying the cat. 'He told me in so many words, that unless I married her she would be penniless, and the money would go to some tenth cousin or so.'

- 'I hope the poor girl did not know this,' said Miss Cartwright uneasily.
- 'He is not the man to keep that sort of pressure to himself.'
- 'Jack, you liked her before there was any talk of these estates?'
  - 'Of course I did.'

He spoke impatiently, as if the subject were already exhausted, whereas Miss Cartwright, longing for fuller details, felt as if it were only beginning.

'I wish I had known Phillis before,' she

said sighing, and at the sigh the young fellow's heart reproached him again.

'She said the same,' he said, turning towards her and speaking gravely; 'I fancy you'll get on with her—everybody doesn't, you know. She's—but there's no good in attempting to describe her, I was never good at that sort of thing; the only thing I could say about you was that you weren't tall or black.'

Miss Cartwright brightened. She had a warm corner ready in her kind heart for the girl who was to be Jack's wife; no jealousy made the prospect bitter, she was already planning, welcoming, sympathising. Jack himself jumped up; he said he would go to the hotel where he was putting up and come back to dinner. It was a concession, for he would encounter Miss Preston, but he had not the heart to disappoint his aunt that first evening, and afterwards he acknowledged

was open, the moon was sailing through blue, profound skies, her light fell like silver on the glossy leaves, and there was a sort of happy hum in the air, distant talk and gay laughter. Miss Preston fell asleep, Jack and his aunt sat near the window, sometimes silent, sometimes chatting. As for Cartouche, he pleased himself in his own way, rushing every now and then into the garden in pursuit of a foe who he was quite conscious did not exist, and returning with the proud air of one who has discomfited his enemy.

As Ibbetson strolled home that night he was thinking of many things, half against the grain, as it were, for he would willingly have put them aside. There were enough outer things to interest him if once he could have got them uppermost, but we cannot do that always, try as we will. The Arno was running along, bright with the moonshine, lights

were twinkling across the bridges, clambering up the hill opposite; black shadows stood out strongly, and as you looked, all sorts of strange memories seemed to rush towards But they took no real hold on Jack, who was only conscious of them in a vague, dreamy way. The people were strolling in all directions, enjoying the evening, as they do in Italy, chatting, whispering, half-a-dozen, perhaps, linked together, taking the whole breadth of the pathway, or coming mysteriously out of the dark shadowy streets. front of the Ognissanti a little lamp threw its dim radiance upon the beautiful blue and white Luca della Robbia over the door: the grave and sweet figures in their perpetual adoration seemed nearer and yet more delicate than by day. Jack noted this as he passed, but all the while it was not really Florence in which he was living, but a more homely and pastoral country. He was provoked with himself; he had not wanted to go over the old ground; he had said to himself a dozen times, that having taken a certain step, there was no need for mentally retracing it.

Only something seemed always to be carrying him back.

Would he have had it different? He said No, resolutely, when the question took so keen a shape. He had always felt a quiet liking for Phillis Grey, and it moved him deeply when he heard Mr. Thornton's rough declaration that if he, Jack, did not marry her she would be left with no more than a miserable pittance. His uncle, after all, showed some knowledge of the character of the man with whom he had to deal, for the personal advantages did not really affect Jack half so much, although he took pains to assure himself that they did. He used to go over them to himself with a half-comic, half-

serious air of business, as if he were quite convinced of their value—independence, position, idleness-the worst of it was that, try as he would, he found each carrying a sort of contradiction with it, which prevented him from enjoying it comfortably. But poor Phillis, how could she bear the loss of everything? Why should he not marry her? He liked no one better, or so well. It was the course which gave the least trouble to everyone. It offered palpable good, and there was no drawback on which he could exactly lay his lack Ibbetson's mind wandered finger. away, up and down, this way and that, but all the time it was tending slowly in one direction, so that on the evening of the day when his uncle had made his announcement, a walk round the shrubberies and a couple of cigars brought him to the window where Phillis was sitting in her white dress, and when he had asked her to come out, it was not difficult,

especially on that quiet tender evening, to ask her to marry him. It was not difficult, it was almost pleasant. There was a tremulous happiness in the girl's answer, and yet all the time Jack was conscious, and hating the consciousness, of what he was saving her from. If it had not been for that, he thought—but there it was, and, after all, was it not one motive?

Before this happened it had been decided that Phillis should go abroad with some friends, and Peter Thornton would have no change. His wife wanted the wedding to have been from Hetherton, but he scouted the idea so fiercely that no one dared to repeat it. Phillis should go, and Jack could go too. As for the marriage, he did not care where it took place, so long as they did not lose any time about it, and then if they wanted to honeymoon it in Italy they would be on the spot. And having an-

nounced his wishes, he took refuge in such a violent fit of the gout, that contradiction became an actual impossibility, and the odd little party started. It seemed more unreal to Jack every day as they came flying on. He had been rather unkind about the journey. Mrs. Leyton felt attractions in Paris. Captain Leyton, who went about with a very elaborate sketching apparatus which provided against rain, sun, and all possible evils of flood or field, and contained a larger supply of paints than could be used in a lifetime, was desirous to turn aside into the country of the Italian lakes, but Jack was obstinately determined to go directly to Florence, and somehow carried his day so far as to get them all to Bologna. There he graciously permitted them to rest; and indeed Ward, the lady's maid, was in a state of rebellion, while Mrs. Leyton, who was goodnatured but sometimes plaintive, went about declaring that having come abroad as much for society as anything else, it was a little hard to be whirled through the country at a rate which prevented your seeing anyone but the horrid people to be met with in the trains.

As for Phillis—but Phillis must wait. Jack was very kind and polite to her, and sometimes amused by her inexperience. He would have been surprised beyond measure if any objection to his plans had come from her.

## CHAPTER III.

## CARTOUCHE KILLS A TURKEY.

FLORENCE had gone back to summer the next day. The heat was intense, the streets were deserted, the very blue of the sky seemed to burn, all the poor green things to have the life drawn out of them by the scorching sun. There was a little loggia at Miss Cartwright's Casa Giulia, where Jack and his aunt could have managed to keep themselves cool if Miss Preston would have permitted it, but she routed them out more than once. Heat or no heat she had no compassion for idleness, and she came tramping up the stairs with bundles of book labels for the Church library, with horrible knitted garments which

she had dragged from wintry receptacles, with all kinds of out-of-season duties which were to rouse Miss Cartwright. She was one of those people whose presence is a perpetual rebuke; it is impossible to fulfil their requirements, you feel yourself making feeble excuses, and going down, down, down, lower and lower in your own opinion and in theirs.

'Why do you let her tyrannise over you?' said Jack indignantly. It is to be feared that he called her an old cat, but all the same he was himself conscious of this uncomfortable sinking in her presence.

'She does not always do things in the pleasantest manner,' said Miss Cartwright gently, 'but she is so conscientious and so useful that it is impossible not to admire her. There is a great deal of misery in Florence, and I am sure I often feel how selfish and idle it must seem to her when I sit in this pretty loggia out of the reach of it all, while

she is always toiling and planning. Indeed, Jack, if you only knew half she did, you would appreciate her better.'

'Heaven forbid!' said the young man fervently.

Even Cartouche, who had made his way up to the loggia, was too sleepy to do anything but snap at persevering flies; the others sat lazily pretending to read or work; every now and then Miss Cartwright asked questions about Phillis; it was all dreamy and quiet. From where they sat they could see other loggias—people at their windows, women coming out on flat shady roofs to water their plants, odd little nests of chimneys like honeycombs, pigeon-holes, mysterious gratings, a curious kind of roof-life of which they made part and which had its interests. In those sunny countries it takes little to make a picture; here the business is elaborate, but there sun and sky do so much that

you want little more—a scarlet flower in a pot, a clambering vine, and the effect is given. Jack lay back idly wondering at the beauty of an old house wall opposite on which the sun poured in golden splendour, and the rich shadows of the eaves marked bold outlines against the sky, when Miss Preston's voice behind made him start.

'If you are busy I am sorry to interrupt you, Mary,' she began, with a searching glance at Miss Cartwright, who was hastily settling her cap, and trying to look as if she had not been asleep, 'but it is necessary that some one should take back the books to the library this afternoon.'

- 'Oh, I think not,' said Miss Cartwright nervously; 'they may really wait until tomorrow, the heat is too intolerable for anything not absolutely necessary to be done.'
- 'I consider this necessary. The books were promised to Vieusseux for to-day.'

Miss Preston spoke in her uncompromising tone, the two culprits looked at each other and fidgeted. Some old nursery story began to run in Jack's head of naughty children, severe fairies, impossible tasks, heaps of shining silks which had to be sorted. Miss Cartwright made another feeble effort.

'I could not ask Winter to go out until it is cooler, but then she might take them.'

'I shall take them myself,' said Miss Preston decidedly. 'I have no desire to delegate duties. I have only come to know whether you wish to try the candles at Lanzi's? In that case, I will call there.'

When she had gone, Jack jumped up in a fume.

'The woman is unendurable,' he said.
'She will be up here again in a moment with some other horrible propositions. I can't stand any more of them. Look here, Aunt Mary, I will take Cartouche back to the

hotel, and in an hour or so it will have cooled down enough to give him a run. You need not think about dinner, I shall get it at Dony's, or somewhere, and look in here again latish in the evening. If she is human she will be asleep then, after all this hunting her fellow-creatures.'

Ibbetson could not stay long at the hotel, where the air was heavy with heat. He made his way through the shady alleys of the Cascine; the people were collecting, the carriages drawn up, gay ladies in all sorts of bright and delicate colours, gentlemen wearing oddly-shaped hats and conspicuous gloves; a gay brilliant scene enough, but not one which at that moment had any attractions for Jack. He had in his pocket a letter from Phillis—the first. It was written with some care and restraint, as he noticed with a sigh which yet he could not have explained. They would leave Bologna for

Florence on Saturday—this was Thursday. The heat was terrific, the arcades were a great comfort, the hotel was excellent, the Etruscan remains were most interesting. The little letter told everything there was to say—mentioned Mrs. Leyton's health, Captain Leyton's sketches—yet Jack was dissatisfied with it, and vexed at his own dissatisfaction. The old vein of thought kept recurring; it was not Tuscany in which he was walking, Tuscany with its golden lights, its wealth of colour, its grapes clambering from tree to tree, but more prosaic Surrey where carts were drawing their heavy harvest loads along the roads, and Hetherton lay low amidst its masses of dark trees. The picture caused him a little thrill of revulsion, and then a sharper thrill of self-reproach.

Jack knew nothing of the road along which he was plodding; indeed, it was not always a road, he went here and there where

it seemed shady and out of the dust, along the tall canes by the side of the Arno, sometimes through a vineyard, where the contadini were gathering the beautiful fruit with their sickles. At last he found himself climbing a hill, where the road was white, steep, and stony, and to his left was one of those walls which you may yet see built round the old villas, sloping inwards, as if originally set up for defence. Presently he came, of course, to the little niche high up in the wall, where, behind a grating, were rudely coloured figures of the Madonna and Child, and an earthenware pot in which some scarlet lilies were flaming. Somehow such little tributes are more touching than the most elaborate decorations: Ibbetson found himself wondering who had placed them there, as he went toiling up his hill. next moment he reached the entrance of the villa; iron gates standing open led into a

rather untidy looking drive, arched over by tall trees of paradise and paulownias; and the shade of their broad leaves was so attractive a contrast to the dusty road, that he stood and looked in for a few minutes. There was an unreasonable attraction to him about the place. He smiled at himself when it struck him, and whistling to Cartouche, who had plunged among the trees, prepared to continue his tramp up the stony hill.

But Cartouche was not forthcoming. On the contrary, certain sounds were to be heard implying that he had met with a very congenial amusement within—a rustling among bushes, short sharp yelps, terrified gobblings, flutterings, then a girl's cry. Jack whistled and called in vain, finally ran along the drive and found himself in a broad space before the villa, where two men armed with sticks were pursuing Cartouche, three or four young turkeys were flying helplessly about, and a girl stood holding another, apparently dead, in her hands. The instant she saw Ibbetson she stamped her foot, and cried out passionately in Italian—

'Take away that wicked, villainous dog, do you hear!'

Jack was struck dumb, not at the command, but at the face which was turned towards him. He had never in his life seen so beautiful a creature. The large brown eyes flashed reproachfully through their tears, the rounded and glowing cheek might have belonged to a Hebe, the indignant curl of the short upper lip only showed more strongly the beauty of its curves. She stood facing him, one hand holding the dead bird, the other pointing inexorably at Cartouche, who, aware of his misdeeds, skilfully avoided a blow aimed by one of the gardeners, and fled behind his Then her face changed slightly, and master. she looked down at the bird.

'You are not Italian,' she said still vehemently, but in English so pure as to excite the young man's wonder more keenly, 'and perhaps you did not know about it; but your dog should not come in and kill our turkeys. See, it is quite dead,' she added, holding it out; 'and they were such dear little things, my sister and I had just brought them in a basket from the podere to show my mother.'

'I am very sorry, very sorry indeed,' said Ibbetson with great earnestness, 'and very much ashamed that I did not keep a better look out.'

'If you were only passing by in the road, of course you could not help it,' said the girl, looking at him gravely; 'but perhaps you will try to prevent his doing it again. I should be very much obliged if you would, for I cannot bear to see things hurt.'

'I will certainly flog him.'

There was a pause, and she took another vol. 1.

survey, but this time it was of Cartouche, whom his master was holding.

- 'He does not seem a very fierce dog?' she said inquiringly.
- 'Quite the reverse,' said Ibbetson smiling.
  'He is little more than a puppy, and this mischief is only play, but still it is necessary he should be taught what he is not to do.'

Jack was looking very determined; Cartouche had the air of a victim. The girl glanced at the turkey which she still held, and again at the dog.

- 'Perhaps,' she said slowly, as if rather ashamed of herself, 'you will not beat him? The turkey is dead, and I think he understands he is not to do it again. Indeed, Antonio shall carry the rest back to the farm. You will not beat him?'
- 'You have a right to say what shall be done.'
  - 'Then I say that,' she said, brightening

and clapping her hands. 'Here is my sister, I must tell her about it.'

She ran to meet a younger girl who came down the steps of a terrace. Ibbetson stood where she had left him, feeling a little awkward, it must be confessed, and not knowing whether he was to go or stay, or into what strange place he had fallen. Were these people English or Italian? The girl's type of beauty was Italian, but the English she spoke bore no trace of being acquired. The villa was square, large, and apparently out of repair; there was a tower which looked older than the rest of the building, and a handsome high-arched entrance. Plants were arranged in pyramids round vases or statues; there were lemon trees in great tubs, tiny oranges hanging between the leaves, tube roses scenting the air, glossy acanthuses. centre of the broad space in front of the house, where Jack was standing, was a pond

with a fountain in its midst, which you might reach from the villa through a covered way matted over with banksia roses, and having seats at intervals under the cool shade. He had just time to notice all this when the two girls turned and joined him.

'This is my sister,' said his first acquaint ance with a pretty little gesture of introduction, 'but we do not know your name, or anything about you, except that you are English.'

'My name is Ibbetson, John Ibbetson,' said the young man laughing, and yet reddening slightly. 'You are quite right in supposing that I am English, but will you pardon me if I ask whether you can possibly be my country people?'

'I am,' said the younger girl shyly, and her sister turned upon her a reproachful look.

'And I, too,' she said quickly. 'What makes you doubt it? English people often

live abroad, as you must know. We are called Masters, my mother is in the house, and you will come in to see her, of course.'

Jack muttered something about his dress and the dust, but the girl shook her head imperatively.

'That does not matter in the least. We live here alone and see nobody, that is why I wish you to go in; I know it is not good for mamma to be so solitary, and have no one but us. Kitty and I often talk about it, but what can we do? There are only the gardeners, and old Andrea, the cook, and the people at the farm, and she does not care about the farm. We brought the turkeys back to-day just for a little amusement.'

'And I was so unfortunate as to be the cause of putting an end to it.'

'Yes,' said the girl gravely, 'but never mind. Your coming to see her will be better, perhaps. This way, please.'

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'Yes,' said the girl gravely, 'but never mind. Your coming to see her will be better, perhaps. This way, please.'

Ibbetson followed, half amused and half piqued. It was quite evident that he was only looked upon as a new and possible means of entertainment where other means were wanting, and yet the girl's manner was so simple and frank that it was impossible to feel offended. And the brightness, the unconventionality of the scene charmed him. air was full of wonderful gleaming lights, of Every line of the old villa sweet scents. seemed in harmony with the rich colouring about it: so were the sisters in their cool white dresses. It was all strange and yet familiar, and he followed, wondering what new features would presently disclose themselves, whether it was to end in a fairy tale or plainest English prose. Cartouche, fortunately still a little subdued by the consciousness of misdoing, was tied into a thicket of scarlet geraniums by the side of the entrance, then Kitty pushed the heavy door, and passing through a small

marble-paved hall, opened another door leading into an immense salon, perhaps fifty feet long. To English eyes it looked but barely furnished, but it was cool and well shaded; two large windows opened on a terrace, and there, on a white marble table, under the shade of a magnificent paulownia tree, was spread the dinner service. It was like a feast in Boccaccio, Jack thought, after the stuffy table d'hôtes and the stuffier dining room Hetherton-stands of bright flowers, piles of rosy peaches, grapes full of lustrous colour, plums, figs heaped on their dishes, and two or three green melons lying in the midst of this gay confusion of colour.

'It is nearly seven o'clock, I see,' said the elder girl, glancing carelessly at it. 'Kitty, tell Pasquale to set another place; of course you will dine with us,' she added, turning to the young Englishman, 'but please to come

to the breakfast room, mamma is sure to be there.'

As she spoke she opened a door which led into another and smaller salon, and from this they went through another. Both had inlaid floors and marble tables; in one a couple of marble statues stood looking sadly and reproachfully, so Jack fancied, at the girl who went quickly by without so much as glancing towards them, her beautiful face eager, her cheeks glowing. There were no statues in the second room, only black negro boys holding flower-stands; but the stands were empty, and evidently the rooms were uninhabited, and even on this day a little dreary. It was different with the little room to which they led; there all the available furniture had been gathered. It was not very handsome, but a pretty home-like air hung about everything. A glass door opened on steps which went down to a gay little flower garden, and were shaded by a weeping willow, while from some unseen source there came a pleasant refreshing sound of bubbling water. In a low chair near the window sat a lady who had probably been asleep, from the bewildered air with which she looked up, and Jack's companion evidently thought so too, for she gave a little impatient pat upon her shoulder.

'Wake up, mamma, we have got something quite new for you to-day,' she began in the tone in which one would offer a toy to a spoiled child. 'Here is an English gentleman who is going to dine with us. I dare say you have just come from England, and know about things?' she continued, addressing him.

Jack felt an irresistible inclination to laugh, and yet there was something in the little scene which touched him. He had been taken possession of without much freedom of action being permitted him, and now was expected to play off his tunes like a wound-up barrel organ. But it was impossible not to see that the girl was free from any thought of self, and as she made this last appeal the wistfulness in the beautiful brown eyes went to his heart. He was going to speak, but she interrupted him.

'Wait a moment,' she said quite gravely,
'I had forgotten. This is Mr. Ibbetson,
mamma. Mr. Ibbetson—Mrs. Masters.'

Her mother put out her hand languidly.

'Beatrice is original in her introductions, but she knows that anyone who can tell me about my own country is welcome at Villa Carlina,' she said.

They fell into chat quite easily, indeed everything about the house seemed free from formality or stiffness, Ibbetson thought. Mrs. Masters was a largely built, fair woman, slow in movement; generally her face looked

placid, but sometimes a startled expression crossed it which gave a sudden sharpness to the lines on her forehead. She dressed rather untidily, and with an evident leaning towards bright colours; her voice went on in a pleasant plaintive ripple, and there was no labour in the conversation. Bicè took no part in it. She had drawn a low chair to the head of the steps, and sat leaning forward, her elbow on her knee, her chin resting on her hand, all the delicate lines of her white dress falling in graceful folds. Jack thought, as he looked, that a sculptor could not have found a more perfect attitude, or a more exquisitely moulded head, thrown out as it was by the background of cool green outside. Who was she? How came she by an English name, and yet the highest type of Italian beauty? The other girl came in, and he could see that she was three or four years younger; she was so slender as to be

thin and almost angular, and bore not the least resemblance to either Bicè or her mother.

'Yes, it is pretty here,' the mother was saying, 'especially just now in the vintage But it becomes very monotonous; the days go by one after the other, all alike, and all dull. There are no neighbours, or hardly any. The Moronis come sometimes, young Giovanni brings his guitar, and the girls sit out there on the steps and sing. Yes, that is pretty, too, but still one tires, and in the winter of course it is a hundred times worse. I do envy the people in Florence, who have theatres and the Cascine always to fall back upon. For myself it does not matter; but you will understand that it is a trial to see these children growing up with none of the advantages of other girls—I am afraid very unlike others.'

She looked at Ibbetson for sympathy, but

what could he say? It was in this very unlikeness that it seemed to him the charm lay, and yet he was sure this was not a woman to understand it. Bice had clasped her hands round her knee, and was staring out of the window frowning.

. Don't talk about Florence, mamma,' she said impatiently. 'Everybody knows what Florence is; Kitty and I would not live there for anything in the world. Is it any good for people to drive about in their best clothes and look at one another? But we are English, you know; please tell us about England,' she went on, addressing Ibbetson, 'or stay—there is the dinner bell, come to dinner; I will meet you on the terrace, and bring your dog, for he must have something to eat, though he did kill my poor little turkey.'

To Jack that dinner was unlike all others; he half expected to awake from a dream of

delicious air, of sweet scents, and the gorgeous fruits with which the table was piled. The little party sat on two sides of it; Beatrice, opposite, looked at him with grave questioning eyes; Kitty was shy and did not say much; but Mrs. Masters' talk rippled on without more break than a little accompaniment of sighs. Old Andrea, the fat cook, brought up one of the dishes himself in order that he might see the English signore. He stood with his hands behind him, smiling and gossiping in a full rich voice about the news of the little town from which he fetched the letters every day. Afterwards they went back to the morning room. Crimson cushions had been laid on the steps; Mrs. Masters buried herself in an arm chair at the top, the others sat about on the cushions. The glow of the setting sun still lingered in the clear sky; there were faint sounds of rustling leaves, of dropping water, the cry of grilli, the soft

patter of naked feet as the gardeners ran about, watering.

- 'We should have no flowers otherwise,' explained Kitty; 'the lemon trees alone require it every night. They will go on until ten o'clock.'
  - 'I am looking out for fire-flies,' said Jack.
- 'Oh, you are much too late; you will not see them after June. They come to light the corn to grow, and every night as the clock strikes twelve they creep up the stems of the trees and go to sleep.'

It was all possible, Jack felt, in this land of enchantment. Presently, without any prelude, the two girls began to sing a wild sweet stornello. The voices were not very strong, but they were like one; they went on rising, falling, answering back again, dying away at last into the other sounds. Cartouche came rushing along; Jack got up and shook himself.

'Must you go? We often sit out here until very late,' said Mrs. Masters, rousing herself from a nap. 'But you will come again?'

'Will you come to-morrow? We are going on a fig-eating expedition with the Moronis. 'We shall start at about four,' said Bice, 'and go to their farm.'

'I will be here without fail,' said the young man eagerly. He went away into the cool dusky shadows in a sort of bewilderment; there had been something so unlooked-for and novel in this little episode, that it impressed him more than a hundred more important things. The questions he had half forgotten came forward again. Who were they? What had brought them there?

'Buona notte, signore.'

It was old Andrea the cook, who was standing smoking a cigar at the entrance gate, and probably on the look-out for a little gossip.

'A fine vintage this year. The signore has without doubt seen our vintage? No? Is it possible? Then he will do so this September. The padrona's grapes will be brought to be weighed next week; the signorine will take the signore to see them cut. Eh, eh, the signorina Beatrice can tell him everything. See here, she has a head as good as my own, though I say it. It is wonderful, a young girl like that, whom I have nursed on my knee many and many a time. Sometimes, when I hear her giving her orders, I stare, I cannot believe it. But then she is one of us, which explains it,' added the old man with pride.

'Do you mean that she is not English?' asked Jack, interested in this confirmation of the ideas which had been floating about in his head since the first moment of seeing Bice.

Old Andrea shook his head vehemently.
'No, no, no,' he said, 'not the signorina.
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Her father was a Capponi; she is a Capponi, anyone can see that who looks in her eyes, if the signore will excuse me for saying so. She is a Capponi all over.'

'But she told me she was English,' said Jack, amused at the old man's indignation.

'She has whims, though she is so clever,' said Andrea testily. 'Most of the clever ones have. Her mother is English, if you will—what of that? And possibly the padrone did not treat her over well—who knows? He was a man who liked his own way, and perhaps did not much care how he got it. Altro! The signore knows that men are not all made in the same fashion, and the Capponi were used to being masters. At any rate, he is dead.'

'And his wife?'

'Si, signore, as you see. She married again, before the stone that covers his grave up at San Miniato had time to lose its whiteness. I go there sometimes. There are not

many others that remember. But as I was saying, the signora married quickly, and this time it was to a stranger—an Englishman—with two children.'

'Two?'

'Two. There is a young man in some country of strangers, very probably it is England, and the signore has perhaps brought news of him? No? Ah, then he will see him on his return. That will delight the signorina, for she has given her heart to these new-comers. But for all that she cannot help being a Capponi, and no one can mistake her. Such a padrona as she makes! Such a head, such a head! Only ask them at the podere what it is like. The signore goes to Florence?'

'Yes,' said Jack, who had been lighting his cigar. 'I suppose there is no shorter road than down this hill?'

'If the signore can keep in his dog he

can branch off through the vineyards to the left. I will show him the path in a moment, and it will be much quicker.'

Andrea, delighted at this chance of a gossip, talked on as they went down the hill. It was chiefly loyal, admiring homage to the signorina which filled his mind, and Ibbetson was interested in the ideas he gathered of a homely and simple life, unlike that of which he was accustomed to think. When he parted from Andrea, it seemed to him as if he had known Bice for months instead of hours; a curious charm already hovered about her, and the remembrance of the wistful looks which sometimes crossed her face like a contradiction. He left the old man standing in the road, and turned off into the steep and stony track which had been pointed out to him as his path. No one was visible when he got among the vines, but following Andrea's advice, he kept the unwilling Cartouche close by his side, and walked quickly, for it was growing late, though a bright moon made the blue sky clear. The air was light and fresh. A few olive trees, twisted and gnarled, bordered the path, their grey leaves catching the light like silver; then the Arno came into sight flooded with radiance; presently the twinkling lights of Florence gleamed out from dark masses of building, and cupola, and tower, and one larger blot which marked the Duomo of Our Lady of Flowers. All over the plain these lights glittered, faintly bright, here far apart, here tremulously disclosing themselves to the eye, as shyly as the stars of heaven itself. When Ibbetson reached the city streets he felt as if he had left enchantment behind him. The thoughts which had troubled him the evening before, now did not once intrude. Hetherton might never have been, and the charm of Italy was at work.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE FARM ON THE HILL.

Most people are acquainted with the sensation of being caught in a sudden and unexpected manner in some little eddy of society or circumstance, and how they are swept away before they know where they are. But if it is odd and startling to ourselves, it is much more so to those who are untouched by the currents; and when, at the appointed time on the next day, Ibbetson went off to Villa Carlina, he left Miss Cartwright a little perplexed at what he had told her, and at his newly-awakened interest.

To himself the villa, when it came in sight, seemed full of pleasant and friendly

expectations. He heard sounds before he saw where they came from; then Cartouche boldly plunged under the banksia arches, and there was a little cry of dismay, laughter, children's voices. 'This way,' some one called out, and when he reached them he found a gay little company sitting under the green shade, and was welcomed without formality.

'Now we are all here, we will start directly,' said Bice. 'Come, little children!'

But the children were in a state of ecstatic delight over Cartouche's amazement at the hundreds of gold fish which came crowding to the edge of the pond. He barked and snapped, snapped and barked in vain, and at last, in a frantic attempt to reach them, tumbled headlong into the pond, out of which he scrambled with his enthusiasm a little checked.

Mrs. Masters was not going; the walk,

she said, was quite beyond her strength, and they left her strolling back to the house, where she gave them the hope she might employ herself in writing some letters which had long been waiting. The others set off merrily. There was Giovanni Moroni, a youth of two or three-and-twenty, dark, bright-eyed, with cropped hair, and a frank pleasant smile. It was to his podere, high up the hill, that they were bound. There was also his sister, the Contessa, and her husband, who was grey-headed and fierce. The children were theirs; they came from Genoa, and were wild with delight at the country life and their escape from a dark old palace. Kitty and Cartouche speedily became their victims. Bice was kind, but, this afternoon at least, a little graver than the others, for many thoughts were rushing through her head as they went clambering and laughing up the hill.

That little outline which old Andrea had given to Jack told as much of her story as there was, to all appearance, to tell. But to her own thinking a great deal remained unknown-problems, possibilities, were sweeping through the air, and troubling her with a hundred perplexing doubts and shadows, which it was left to her unaided to solve or to disperse—to her, little more than a child, as she was! Everything was simple and a little dull to Mrs. Masters. She had gone through such ill-usage and insult as would have scared most women's lives: and when it was all over, feathered out again with no more result than a mild assurance that from that time forward she had a right to whatever comfortable compensation she could get out of existence. Bice's passionate little soul reached the same conviction through quite another road, through all sorts of fiery impulses, horror at her father's cruelty, con-

tempt, devotion, flinging of herself into the breach, heedless of anything she might have to suffer for her championship. So sad a warfare was it for a child to go through, that it was a wonder so much that was good and noble had survived it. She had always constituted herself her mother's protector, and now that her father was dead she had a sort of odd notion that it was she who had to make up to her for the sufferings she had gone through. She was ready to accept Mr. Masters, anything that could help them to forget the old life. She was glad that her mother bore another name, and insisted upon sharing it herself against all law and right, and the equally persistent obstinacy of old It was this which brought a sudden flame of anger into her cheeks that very afternoon, as they climbed along a steep stony track, on one side shaded by hawthorn bushes, on the other falling away into fields, a valley, and a little stream.

- 'One might be in England,' Ibbetson said, standing still to look round.
- 'Is it so like?' asked Bice eagerly. 'Kitty never told me that it was. I shall come here often.'
- 'You have a great fancy for England, and yet you might be content with your own country,' said Jack smiling.
- 'England is my country,' she said, and it was then the red began to deepen in her cheeks.
  - 'But you are a Capponi?'

She stopped and faced him, her eyes flashing, her whole figure quivering.

'Who told you so?' she cried angrily.
'It was that old Andrea, I am certain. I will not have it. I am not Capponi any longer. I am English, and English only.'

She kept away from him for some time after this outburst, though he tried more than once to make his peace. It was only after he had pointedly called her by her mother's name that she relented and became friendly again.

The podere lay some way up the hill which they were climbing. At last they reached it, a picturesque building well baked by the sun, with a low tower, tiled, a round arch or two, and deep eaves. Outside stood beautiful great oxen with wide-spreading horns, and two or three children were watching and ran eagerly to fetch the contadino. When he had come out and had spoken a few words to his padrone, young Moroni, the latter led the way to a door in the wall, within which was a kind of rough garden, full of fig-trees laden with fruit. One or two brown-faced boys came running with tables and chairs.

'Ah! but this is truly idyllic, my Giovanni,' said the young countess, sinking into a chair. 'If I must confess the truth, I could not have walked another ten steps.'

She was not exactly pretty, but slender and fragile-looking, and she generally contrived to do as much as she liked and no Her fierce husband adored and petted her, and she was very fond of him and of the children, whom she expected him to keep in order or amuse as the case might be. Wherever she was she liked to form the centre, and now she managed to draw them all round her, except Bice. strolled away alone towards the other end of the garden, here and there picking a rose, or one of the half-wild flowers which grew without care just as they had been stuck in. The girl was in a strange and dissatisfied mood that day; it seemed as if different strings were vibrating together, making odd

discords and harmonies. Some had been set in motion by things which Ibbetson had said the day before, others had been touched and jarred, she scarcely knew how or why: questions and perplexities seemed to have awakened just at the moment when she had intended them to be silent. From that father from whose memory she shrank she had inherited many characteristics: among them a strong will, and a desire to thrust whatever was painful to her out of sight. 'Why should I be obliged to remember now?' her heart cried out angrily, as she turned and looked at the gay little group, already beckoning to her to return to them. 'Clive is Kitty's own brother, and she is not thinking about him, and Oliver has not come yet, and things are not worse than they were yesterday, when I was not half so unhappy. And to-day I meant to enjoy myself and to forget it all. Why does it come back now?'

She was impatient at her own weakness, and yet could not master it; tears rushed into her eyes, she turned hastily away, and laid her arms upon a low wall, heedless, for the moment, of anything but her own unhappiness.

'You must not desert us in this way,' said some one behind. 'We are waiting for you before we begin the great business of the day, which is much more formidable than I thought.' And then his voice changed, and became very kind and grave. 'Is anything the matter? Has anyone vexed you, that you go away and leave us?'

For she had turned and looked him full in the face, careless that the tears were running down her cheeks. A desperate longing seized her to tell him her troubles and to ask his help. The poor child had so few from whom she could seek it, that it seemed to her as if this kind voice might give her aid in the labyrinth where she was losing herself. The longing was of course utterly foolish and unreasonable. Jack was an utter stranger, and the next moment her face burnt at the thought of what her impulse had been. He for his part could not understand the piteous appeal in her eyes, or the change in which it died out. She said quickly—

'Vexed? Oh, no! I was unhappy because I was thinking of my brother Clive.'
'Is he ill?'

'No, not ill. He is in some trouble in England. I don't quite know what it is myself,' she went on, looking frankly at him, 'and I dare say that makes it worse. But it is nothing new, and I cannot think why it should come to me so strongly just now. Do you ever feel as if things seized you with a rush and without any reason?'

Jack thought of his walk by the Arno the night before. This girl with her changing moods, her frank appeals, interested him. He felt a strong desire to help her—a desire which was perhaps made more vigorous by the consciousness of her wonderful beauty. He answered the first part of her speech.

'You must have so many friends that it seems ridiculous to suppose that I can do anything about your brother. But can I?'

A sudden gladness lit her eyes.

'Could you?' she said, eagerly answering his question by another. 'I dare say you could. You are very much mistaken if you suppose we have many friends; I don't know that we have any at all.'

It was said slowly and as if she were considering, and for that very reason it almost startled Jack. The words were strange, coming from such lips.

'That is impossible,' he said decidedly.
'But about your brother?'

'It is a long story, you see. I couldn't tell you now.'

'No, I understand, of course you couldn't. Come back to the others,' he went on kindly. 'You can talk the matter over with your mother and your sister'—Bice shook her head with an amused smile—'and tell me when you like. Then we will see what can be done.'

The swift changes in her face and manner were certainly interesting. The cloud had passed; she was smiling, radiant, flashing out with odd unexpected speeches, playing with Cartouche, helping Giovanni to pick up the figs, helping everybody. Two or three boys ran up the tree like squirrels, and in a few minutes had brought great baskets full. All the Moroni party ate them Italian fashion, as a sandwich between raw ham and bread; the contessa teased Bice.

'She knows there is nothing more delicious; it is only the Anglo-mania which prevents her doing as we do. I can forgive Kitty—but you, Bice!'

Ibbetson thought that young Moroni looked annoyed.

'Why should the signorina have Anglomania?' he said hotly. 'At any rate the signore has just said there are no such figs in England.'

'Ah, why, why, why?' cried out the girl gaily. 'Do not let us ask questions or find fault. Do you know, Giovanni, that it is absolutely delicious here in your old farm garden. I did not think it had been half so pleasant.'

'Yet you have been here before,' said the young man, flushing with delight.

'Was it like this? Then I must have forgotten. There is nothing so nice at our podere.'

- 'Have you a farm?' Ibbetson asked Kitty.
- 'Yes,' she said, with a little shy stiffness in her manner. 'It is in another direction.'
  - 'And who manages it?'
- 'Bice is really padrona. But the contadino, who is the tenant, manages it; you know that is the custom here. He pays us half of everything, the live stock and the crops.'

So long a speech was almost too great an effort for Kitty, and she jumped up and took refuge with the children, who were sitting in a heap munching figs, and occasionally trying to thrust one down Cartouche's throat. A boy in the tree over their heads tossed the cool green fruit into their laps.

'Pippa has only eaten twelve,' said little Gigi, planting his white teeth in the rind. 'Only twelve! That is because she is a girl, and so little!'

Pippa plodded on sturdily, paying no attention to the insult. The broad leaves cast broken masses of shade upon the long grass, the clear whiteness of the western sky was changing to amber.

'How well you speak our language!' said the little contessa graciously to Ibbetson. 'Believe me, it is a compliment we all appreciate. Now when Bice's other English friend is here, the Signore—Trent—how do you call him? we are obliged to fall back upon French. Eh, Bice, it is so, is it not?'

'Yes,' said the girl shortly.

She was grave again, as Ibbetson remarked. The changes in her manner and in her face were so rapid that he found himself watching and wondering. He had never met with anyone who showed so openly whatever passed across her mind.

'Is he coming again soon? He is your relative, is he not?' persisted the contessa.

## 'He is Kitty's cousin.'

It was the first time she had spoken as if Kitty and she were not absolutely one in their possessions, and her tone had an unwilling ring about it. Perhaps it piqued her friend's curiosity, for she threw back her head, and said in a low amused voice—

'You are mysterious, carina. Is the subject too sacred to be discussed?'

The girl's eyes flashed, she sprang up angry and impatient.

'Are we going to stay here all our lives?' she cried with a sharpness which cut poor Giovanni to the heart. If he had heard what had just passed he might have been better satisfied, but he had been looking another way, choosing some of the best figs for the beautiful Eve who had praised his little Paradise, and he heard nothing until there came this sharp, scornful speech, which made a desert of it all. Yet how lovely she looked

standing there, her head thrown up, the exquisite outline of her profile clear against the golden sky! And when she turned, and saw the young fellow's frightened face, her own melted, and a sudden smile dimpled her cheeks.

'Was I so rude, Giovanni?' she said gently. 'I did not mean it, really. It has all been charming, delightful, only now it is time to go. Nina knows it, but she is lazy. I must be the one to tell you what is prudent. Come, Kitty, come, children, the reign of figs is over, but we will carry back a basket-full for mamma. She always says there are none like those which grow up here on Giovanni's mountain.'

All the way home she was softer and gentler than Ibbetson had yet seen her. Pippa was tired, and nothing would please her but that Bice should carry her. The little creature, with her curly black hair, fell asleep

in her arms, and the girl would not have her moved or awakened, walking on firmly and strongly with her burden. She led them down by another path, in spite of the contessa's complaints that it was both longer and steeper.

'It will not harm you,' Bice said quietly, 'and you will see something worth seeing.'

But it was not until they had turned a shoulder of the hill where, on a sort of stony terrace, a few old olives stood grey and shadowy in the midst of a flood of colour, that Ibbetson knew what she had brought him to see. For below, and stretched before him, spread that wonderful plain of Valdarno which is beyond the power of pen or pencil; and now, as it lay bathed in the radiance of the setting sun, he felt as if he had never before known its beauty. A haze, not of mist, but of colour, seemed to rest upon it, so delicate and so varied that its intensity was scarcely

felt, and the villas and farms with which the plain is thickly studded gleamed like jewels in the midst of this wonderful setting. On the opposite hill rose Bellosguardo with its cypresses, those trees which throughout Italy give point and force to softer beauties; and below, the domes and towers of Florence lay in the full glory of the sunset lights.

Only one of the party did not look at its beauty; young Moroni was looking at Bice instead. She still had the child in her arms, and he came to her side and said wistfully—

'Let me take Pippa the rest of the way, she is too heavy for you;' and quite unexpectedly Bice gave her to him with a smile. She would not, however, walk by his side, as he had hoped; she would walk with nobody; she lingered behind, gathering here and there a flower which had survived the summer heats. The contessa claimed the other gentleman, Kitty had the children in charge and

Cartouche, who was a little overwhelmed by an unusual sense of virtue, Bice straggled after them, singing to herself. Ibbetson, who was listening for it, could now and then hear a little break of song come flying down from behind in a tantalising manner. He began to hate the little contessa, who was not half so interesting as this girl with her contradictions, her odd moods. He waited his opportunity, but not until the villa was in sight could he make an excuse for pausing to join Bice. She was some distance in the rear, and came towards him very slowly. Then he saw that something was wrong.

- 'What is the matter?' he asked quickly.
- 'Nothing. Why did you wait?' she said with a touch of petulance of which he took no notice. He was looking at her hand, round which she had wrapt a handkerchief.
  - 'What have you done to your hand?'
  - 'I have told you it is nothing,' she said

in the same tone. 'I have run a thorn into it, that is all.'

- 'A thorn would not give you so much pain.'
- 'Well, it may be a little splinter; I think it is. Go on, please, and don't say anything about it.'
  - 'Not to your sister?'
- 'Oh, dear me, of course not!' she said with vexation. 'Anything of this sort makes Kitty quite ill, don't you understand? Please go to the villa, I shall be there presently.'
- 'But I am not going to the villa,' said Jack quietly; 'I am going to look at your hand.'
  - 'I can take it out myself.'
  - 'If you please.'

Bice was evidently unaccustomed to have her own will set aside; she stared at him in amazement, and a bright flush which looked like resistance rose to her cheek. Perhaps, however, she thought resistance undignified, or perhaps Jack's waiting attitude took too much for granted; for after a momentary struggle she hastily unwrapped her hand and silently stretched it out.

He could hardly repress the exclamation which rose to his lips. It was cruelly bruised and torn, and the suffering must have been great.

'How could you have done it?' he said reproachfully.

'I was standing on a stone to gather a little flower which I saw in a bush, and the stone slipped. I fell on my hand, and I think something caught in it and ran in.'

She held her hand steadily for his inspection, but she had grown pale, and to tell the truth, the prospect of his amateur surgery made him very uncomfortable. He turned in his mind the possibilities of finding a doctor, but it was most improbable that one lived within a moderate distance, and the splinter was momentarily increasing the irritation. She would not hear of getting help from the house, and Jack hastily determined to do the best he could for her, uttering a fervent mental hope that she would not faint.

He need not have feared. After the first sharp pain had made her shrink, she let her hand lie quite passive, and although persistently keeping her face turned away, from first to last uttered no sound. Perhaps this self-restraint made him nervous, perhaps he was inexperienced in the work, for he knew through every nerve in his own body that he was giving her sharp and even unnecessary pain. When the splinter was drawn out, his own face was nearly as white as hers. The girl noticed this as he straightened himself.

'I am afraid you disliked it as much as Kitty,' she said remorsefully.

- 'It was clumsy work,' said Jack; 'I know that I hurt you horribly.'
- 'Never mind,' said Bice. 'Chiara shall put some of her healing herbs, and I think the pain is all over.'

Was it so indeed? Did nothing whisper to her of another pain, a deeper smart, which this very moment was bringing? What sweet and tremulous pang seemed to smite her in the silence which fell for a moment? A moment—no more—and yet there are moments which go on for years.

Bice drew back her hand without another word of thanks.

The others, too, had had a little misadventure to detain them—the contessa had torn her dress, and it required consultations, laments, and pinnings; so that when they were finished, Jack and Bice were not far behind. They were all to dine at the villa, and went along straight stiff walks bordered by

cypresses towards the little flower-garden by the breakfast-room. As they reached it, Cartouche growled angrily at a gentleman who was coming quickly down the steps. Moroni, still carrying the child, met him first, then came the contessa, who turned and beckoned gaily to Bice. The girl, when she saw him, half stopped. Ibbetson noticed that she became pale, and that her lips quivered.

- 'Who is it?' he asked curiously.
- 'It is Oliver Trent,' she said in an odd, frightened undertone.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE ILEX WALK.

IBBETSON was not quite himself the next morning, Miss Cartwright thought with a gentle uneasiness. He did not always hear when he was addressed, and he did not say much about the event which was filling her own mind—the arrival of the travellers. They were to come from Bologna by the evening train, and Miss Cartwright would willingly have talked of nothing else. Miss Preston, whose delight it was to paint darkly the characters of her friend's friends, had shaken her head with great energy over all she had gathered of the villa, and Jack's conduct in absenting himself there, but Miss

Cartwright was altogether impervious to the most direct innuendoes. She was very glad he had made pleasant friends, and seen a little of Italian villa life; she was very sorry for the two fatherless young things, and when Phillis came, perhaps they might all drive out together to Villa Carlina; worst of all, she was quite sure Miss Preston would enjoy the change. As for any danger to Phillis's happiness, the idea never crossed her simple and loyal mind.

Nor, after all, was there much danger as yet. Jack was struck, interested, touched, but the feelings kept themselves where they started, not having run on into any thrill of love. Whether if he had been free when he saw Beatrice matters might not have been different, one cannot say. Perhaps. But he, too, was loyal. To him his engagement was a fact, and his word a bond; and bonds and facts do exert an influence over

an honourable man, let passion say what it will against them. That there was a certain peril cannot be denied, and it lay in the fact that he did not love Phillis. He felt a sort of attraction, a pitying tenderness, a conviction that to marry her was the best way of bringing a skein or two out of their tangle, but this was not love. And, meanwhile, the white villa set on the hillside, with its flowers, its sweets, its Italian charm; the girl with her beauty, her passionate nature, and yet her revolt against that very nature, interested him. Who was this man, this Oliver Trent, who had so suddenly appeared among them? A red-faced, hard-featured man, the cousin, as they said, of Kitty. But it was not Kitty whom he had watched when they sat on the steps the evening before. was not Kitty who had seemed the most disturbed at his coming. Jack said to himself that it was all nothing to him, still he

could not help feeling curious, and of course common courtesy demanded that he should go that morning to the villa in order to inquire for the injured hand. After that morning he would not be so completely his own master.

This, it will be seen, was the man's view of the matter, neither more nor less. His imagination had been touched, but his mind was clear enough to see things as they were, uncoloured by any strange and dream-like tints. For the girl's, it was different.

Think at what a time of ferment he had suddenly touched her life. She had grown through a childhood, saddened by that dreariest sorrow which can befall a child—want of faith in those it should love—to a womanhood from which it seemed as if all the sweetest belongings of her age—care, watchfulness, guiding, were withdrawn. Its brightness was darkened by memories, burdened by

pledges. No doubt her state of feeling was exaggerated, but through what strivings, seekings after light, yearnings for justice, had that poor bent shoot struggled upwards. The girl had an instinctive hatred of oppression, a longing to protect, to deliver; the sort of spirit which has made heroines before now, but also has often wrecked a woman's own peace. For those who have it sometimes give up what is not theirs to give, the happiness of others—or their own hearts, when they have passed from their keeping.

They have, too, their moments of revulsion, such a moment as had come to Bice. She had believed that she had the strength to do anything which could shield her mother or Kitty—whom she loved with all her heart—from trouble, and the trouble was there like a threatening cloud. Clive Masters, Kitty's brother, had gone to England, and the lad, never very wise, had

fallen into some scrape such as the women out at the Florentine villa did not understand and could but tremble over, when Oliver Trent hinted darkly at its consequences. How darkly, only Bice knew. It had been a revelation to him to note the eagerness, the anxiety with which she listened when first he let drop the suggestion that all was not going well with Clive; a revelation and —a temptation. Nothing of his had touched her before beyond the surface; he had felt with sharp bitterness that the girl in her beauty and her simplicity was absolutely inaccessible. But not now. The tears would spring into her beautiful eyes, a mute anguish of pleading would rise in her face when he talked to her about Clive, the dangers of his position, the probability of some dreadful discovery and disgrace. And then he would gently let fall hints of his own efforts, of how his was the only hand which could restrain the lad, his the one influence staving off exposure and ruin. Very often he wondered at the readiness with which his inventions were received, but what did Beatrice know of the world—such a world as he described? To her it was all vague, unreal, far off; for her, alas, it was not difficult to believe in its wickedness!

But it was only by little and little, by subtile touches on the strings of gratitude and hope, by a gradual coiling round her of a net made up of threads so fine that they were scarcely palpable, that he dared hint at his purpose. If he had shown his hand too openly, and asked her to be his wife as the price of his saving Clive, she might have yielded; but all the generosity of her nature would have risen in revolt against his meanness, she would have married and have hated him. Oliver wanted something better than that for himself, and felt sure of gaining it. To do so he would risk anything, and

it seemed as if his purpose were on the verge of accomplishment; Bice knew what he wanted, knew it in a manner which let it seem the most natural thing in the world, and then Oliver Trent made his great mistake. He went back to England, believing that reflection and solitude, and the judicious letters he would write, would all work for him, believing that he had skilfully provided against all emergencies.

But how could he provide against Cartouche frightening a turkey to death?

If it is strange that two days' acquaintanceship with another man should have been enough to shake his influence, and to awaken the revulsion which has been hinted at, surely the strangeness is not improbable. Oliver's influence had been a power from without, a bewildering mist raised with which he had hidden or distorted one thing after another, and skilfully enveloped

Bice's perceptions, but there was nothing in her nature which was in sympathy with his; nay, rather there was something which drew back shuddering. She might have been stirred to a blind leap for those she loved, but to walk slowly along towards the gulf made it seem a hundred times more terrible. And when-though as it were only in passing—she came face to face with a man out of whose eyes looked truth and straightforward honesty, the contrast affected her, although she hardly knew how. Although she had believed Oliver, she had never really trusted him, and Jack was a person whom you could not help trusting absolutely. Certain characteristics write their signs in a face with unerring accuracy. That night, in the shadowy fragrance of the garden, Oliver Trent, jealously and uneasily watching the girl, did not know that she too was watching him, noting, comparing, growing stiller and

sadder as she did so. A wild longing to escape and to burst her bonds had seized her; horror at what she had done, hope that Ibbetson might find a way to help them; none of them knew what a tumult was driving through her heart as she sat silent.

When the two girls went up to their room, Bice hurriedly pushed back the outer persiennes, and knelt down with her arms on the ledge. A sweet cool air came up laden with the delicious sent of tuberoses, water splashed dreamily in the distance, the grating croak of frogs and the saw of the grilli gave a little sharp invigoration to the softness of the evening. Presently one of the odd little owls which Italians call civette began to hoot and call, and Kitty answered it back.

'I wish Pasquale would get us a *civetta*,' she said. 'Why don't you tell him to do it, Bice? Pasquale never minds what I say, and they are the dearest, wisest little things

Kitty hesitated. Bice, still kneeling at the window, turned her head towards her sister, with her cheek resting on her crossed arms—

- 'And then?' she repeated inquiringly.
- 'I don't quite like to tell you. Sometimes Nina is horrid. Well, she gave a little nod towards you, as if Oliver should take care. Wasn't it a shame?

No answer came. Bice was looking out into the night again. Kitty, who was very affectionate, but not quick in her perceptions, went on with her small ripple of talk.

'What business has Nina to know anything? I can't think how she is clever enough to find out, she has not seen much of Oliver. And why should she trouble herself about it?'

'Don't you know?' said Bice, in a proud and bitter voice, 'she is afraid of Giovanni.'

'Of Giovanni? Oh, nonsense! Why—he is a boy, he is nobody but just—Giovanni! She can't be quite so silly. Bice, I do think you must be mistaken; besides, why should she be afraid?'

Kitty's merry laugh rang out childlike and confident. Bice started to her feet and turned round with a gesture that was almost fierce.

'You don't understand; you don't know anything about the world, you are only a girl. Why should she be afraid?—because we are poor, and Nina is a contessa living in a palace, and so she has found out that there is nothing in all the world so good as money; and as she is fond of Giovanni, she wants him to have a great dota with his wife. That is all, if you want to know.'

- 'Then she is a silly,' said Kitty, unmoved by this outburst. 'As if Giovanni were good enough for you!—or as if money were everything!'
- 'Perhaps it is more than we think,' said Bice, still bitterly; 'sometimes I feel almost sure it is.'
- 'It would give us some new dresses, to be sure,' Kitty said, with a general readiness to assent to her sister's ideas, 'and a piano.' I should enjoy a piano.'
- 'It would do more than that,' Bice said abruptly. And then her voice softened, the beautiful eyes grew wistful; she put her hands on the girl's shoulders, and looked into her face. 'Oh, Kitty,' she said, 'if we only had a little money, you or I, we could save poor Clive without ——'

She stopped suddenly, and Kitty looked startled, for something in Bice's manner thrilled through her.

- 'But,' she said hesitatingly, 'Oliver will do that. He has promised, hasn't he?'
  - 'Yes,' said Bice, very slowly.

Alas! but it was she who had to promise also.

- 'Then it's all right. Oliver can do anything.'
- 'Only if he is to do this, I must marry him.'

She still spoke slowly, but her voice sounded strained and unnatural. Kitty answered cheerfully—

- 'Yes, I know. But you like him, don't you? You made up your mind the last time he was here, and there has been nothing to make you change. And you always wanted to live in England. I don't think Oliver would be at all a bad sort of person to marry.'
- 'I have never said I would marry him,' interrupted her sister.

'No,' said Kitty doubtfully, 'not exactly. Still you intended it.'

'What has Clive done?' said Bice, looking at her with troubled eyes. 'We know very little about it all. Oliver always says we cannot understand, and that it is better for us that he should not attempt to explain; but I think it would be better if he did explain; for now it is like some dreadful dark shadow of disgrace hanging over us, never off one's mind day and night.'

Kitty's eyes filled with tears.

'Is it so bad for you, dear?' she said sadly. 'I have not troubled myself much about it since Oliver said he would arrange. Surely he knows best, and he is the only person to do anything.'

'Why shouldn't Mr. Ibbetson help us?' said Bice in a low voice. Her sister cried out in astonishment, but the girl persisted. 'There are kind people in the world,' she

said, as her eyes brightened. 'If you or I saw anyone in trouble we should do what we could; and he is a man, he knows about England and this world into which poor Clive has tumbled—he might advise us.'

'Not better than Oliver!' exclaimed Kitty, amazed.

'Oh, I'm tired of Oliver,' cried Bice with petulant impatience. Her heart was rising up in revolt against its fate till it burned within her. She was angry with Clive, with Oliver, with Kitty, who could only praise him; most of all with herself, the self which had grown all of a sudden discontented, frightened, and indignant. How was it that the change had come, if it was a change and not rather an awakening? How was it that life had in a few hours blossomed into a hundred possibilities? She had thought of Oliver Trent before with a sort of dull satisfaction, as a means of helping Clive and of averting sorrow from

those she loved; and as he had skilfully managed to make himself necessary to her, her feelings towards him were passive. But this calm was at an end. All that evening she had been comparing, watching, reflecting; a light seemed suddenly to have been turned upon him; she saw things written in his features which she had never discovered before—some, very likely, which were not there at all. 'His eyes are close together, and there is a broad piece of face beyond themthat is not good, I know,' said the critic, 'and his face is red and hard.' And all the time. joined with this revolt, some strong new hope seemed to have leapt into her heart, uncalled for and inexplicable. 'There are kind people in the world,' she had said to Kitty, but what had brought her the sudden conviction? Is it not pathetic sometimes to see how little will win a heart, and yet how much fails to touch it? We take some trifling trouble, and,

lo, an affection is laid at our feet which years cannot change or parting cool. And then, again, we give our life blood, and the gift is scorned. Jack had felt attracted and touched, and had looked and spoken as he felt—kindly, but it was no more than the commonest kindness, though to her it seemed altogether special and delightful.

When Ibbetson reached Villa Carlina that morning, only Mrs. Masters, in her usual condition of good-natured drowsiness, was in the breakfast-room, eating grapes from a great golden bunch which had just been brought in with stalk and leaves attached; but before he had had much time to ponder where he should find the others, Bice came, flushed and smiling, and carrying a great bunch of flowers. Jack felt himself again wondering at her beauty. She had a white dress—indeed, as yet, he had seen her in no other colour—but over her head she had flung a veil of black lace, Milanese

fashion, and the bright flowers in her hands—big scarlet lilies, blue larkspurs, and another blue flower with green spikes—made a brilliant flash of colour against the cool white folds. Mrs. Masters said plaintively—

- 'Where can you have been, Bice? They have been looking for you everywhere until Oliver is quite vexed; go and find them in the garden, and say that you are come.'
- 'There is no hurry,' said the girl lightly; 'they do not want me.'
  - 'But where have you been?'
- 'To gather flowers for the Virgin's niche; and they are so scarce at this time of the year, that I had to go a long way.'
- 'So it is you who keep the flowers supplied?' said Ibbetson, remembering that on the day he first saw the villa he had wondered whose hand had placed the pretty nosegay.
- 'Yes. But we are English, and belong to the English Church,' said Beatrice quickly.

- 'You will see us in Florence to-morrow. Only it seemed so sad to leave that little shrine in the wall desolate after flowers had been laid there for so many years; and the poor peasants who come along that dusty road like to see something fresh and pretty when they look up and pray; and so I am going there now,' she said smiling; 'and you may come if you will, just to see how they get into the grating.'
- 'But there is Oliver,' said Mrs. Masters anxiously.
- 'He has Kitty,' Bice answered. 'Or, if that does not content you, they are in the garden, for I heard their voices, and it is there we are going.'

Nevertheless Ibbetson fancied that she led him along paths which looked mossy and unfrequented. There was a gloom about these paths even on this bright day; dark ilexes shut out the sun overhead, long leaves

of narcissus straggled about, weedy-looking and untidy, amid the undergrowth; one or two mutilated statues kept desolate ward over the silence and dimness. The girl glanced round her and shivered.

'I wish I had not brought you here,' she said uneasily; 'there is something in this walk which always oppresses me.'

'If I had not seen it you would not have made me believe there was so cheerless a spot so near the villa. But then, if you had not told me the contrary, I could not have thought there was any dark shadow near you in your happy country life.'

Foolish, kind Jack! Ever since he had seen the tears in her eyes he had felt that he should like to help her.

Bice stopped and looked earnestly at him.

'That is why I asked you to come with me,' she said with a simple straightforwardness which he had noticed in her before. 'I thought if I could tell you about Clive you might advise us what to do. I fancied I understood, but it has all got into a tangle in my head. May I really tell you?'

If Ibbetson had been less interested than he was, it would have been impossible to have remained untouched by the frank simplicity of her appeal.

'You may depend upon me,' he said gravely.

Then she told her little story in a quiet voice, trying to put it into as few words as possible. Clive was their brother, a lad of twenty-one. About two years before, he had gone to London, having, by Oliver's help, got into some great business house; 'because we are poor, and it was necessary he should do something to make money,' she explained. At first things had seemed to go well; he was quick and pleased his employers, so that lately he had been promoted, but since then

all had been unsatisfactory. Oliver had been the kindest friend, and was the first to give them a warning that the young fellow was not going on so steadily. They had written imploring letters, and Clive had answered them with such a frank acknowledgment that he had been wrong, and such a clearly-expressed determination to turn over a new leaf, that they had been happier. But, alas, six weeks ago Oliver Trent had come out from England and had brought the worst news with him. He persistently refused to tell them in plain words what had happened, but he hinted at conduct on the part of Clive which had come to his knowledge though not as yet to his employers, conduct which-known-must bring terrible disgrace and ruin. The poor women were overwhelmed. He was not Mrs. Masters' son, but he was Kitty's brother, and the others entirely accepted him as their own. What was to be done? Bice's first impulse had been to write and question Clive, but that Mr. Trent had absolutely forbidden. must not know that he was aware of his guilt, or it would be impossible for him to help him. Whatever was done must be done through himself alone, and this at a great risk. could not understand what plan Mr. Trent had in his head; he did not confide it to her: she imagined only that there was some man whose silence he meant to buy; at any rate he had promised to help them provided everything was left in his hands. She flushed and looked down as she said these words, and Ibbetson, whose suspicions had been awakened the night before, guessed that there was another 'provided' which had received a tacit acquiescence. But, good heavens, what was he to say! He had not bargained for a story like this, for being asked to assist in condoning a felony—to which it all pointed. bably the unfortunate boy had forged a signa

ture, and Trent held the proofs, and meant to use them. He remained altogether silent.

In the trouble of her own feelings the girl was not at first conscious of his dismay. She was walking along and looking down, but as he did not speak she glanced at him and stopped with a little cry.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'I shouldn't have told you, I have only set you against him. I should have believed Oliver when he said that no one must know.'

'You need not fear me,' said the young man gravely. 'I mayn't be able to help, but you may be sure I will never betray your trust. And if I can't help, perhaps I may at least advise.'

She stood still and began nervously to pick off the leaves of a branch of ilex and to roll them together.

'If there is any way by which we could

save him from disgrace,' she began hurriedly, when Ibbetson interrupted her—

'But if I understand you rightly, that is just what Mr. Trent has promised to do?'

The girl became very pale.

'Yes,' she said at last with an effort. 'You are right. I don't know why I appealed to you. Forget it, and don't let us say any more.'

Her voice was proud and hurt. She looked straight before her, and was moving forwards when Jack detained her.

'You must let me give you my advice,' he said kindly. 'It will not be the same as Mr. Trent's, and I fear you mayn't like it so well, but if I had a brother in the same position as your brother, I should not rest until——'

<sup>&#</sup>x27;Until-?' she asked with eagerness.

<sup>&#</sup>x27;Until I had induced him to make a clean breast of it.'

- 'You mean to us?'
- 'No: I mean to his employers.'

The girl started as if she had been stung. She stood still, her breast heaved, the burning colour rushed into her face.

'But that is the very disgrace we are trying to avoid!' she cried with a sharp ring in her voice. 'It is cruel to mock me with such words. Why, why that is the worst that could happen, and you speak of it as calmly as if——'

'Mock you!' cried Jack, hurt in his turn.
'Have I ever said anything which should make you think me such a brute? At least hear me until I have explained myself. This affair, whatever it is, if it is covered up and concealed in the manner in which you have hinted, will hang over your heads with a never-ending dread. Something may always bring it to light, and your brother will be haunted by fear of it. But if he takes cou-

rage and speaks openly, his employers will be at once half won over, I am sure of it; they will think of his youth, of his inexperience even business men have hearts, Miss Masters. Believe me, it is the most honourable way.'

She listened very quietly, though her face was still flushed, and when he had finished she remained silent. Suddenly, at a little distance, they heard voices, and Bice said hurriedly—

- 'This is your only advice?'
- 'I can think of nothing else.'
- 'I must have time for considering it, and I don't want Oliver to guess that we have been talking: if you will go straight along this path you will come to a door in the wall by which you can get into the road. Do not be vexed with me for sending you away.'
  - 'One word—how is your hand?'
  - 'Oh, almost well.'
  - 'And when shall I see you again?'

'When you like to come,' said Bice smiling; 'or, perhaps, to-morrow in Florence. We shall be there, as I said, for the service.'

'Then will you come afterwards to luncheon at my aunt's—Casa Giulia? She is longing to make your acquaintance, and I shall feel sure you have forgiven me.'

'Oh, I have forgiven you,' said Bice, after a pause. 'Well, we will come.'

## CHAPTER VI.

## CARTOUCHE INTERRUPTS.

When Ibbetson had left her, Bice hastened to that part of the wall where was the niche to which she was carrying the flowers. A little terrace ran along by means of which she could reach and open the grating, and take out the vase with its withered blossoms. She carried it to a small fountain close by, filled it with clear water, and put in her flaming lilies. Then she took it back to the niche, closed the grating, came down from the terrace, and after a moment's consideration walked slowly towards the place where she had heard the voices.

Kitty and Mr. Trent were standing under

a large acacia tree, and turned quickly round to greet her. Kitty poured out her questions—Where had she been? what had she been doing? did she know they had been looking for her?

'Mamma told me,' said Bice carelessly; 'surely you two might have amused each other for an hour. And it would not have required any superhuman sagacity, Kitty, to guess that I had gone for the flowers.'

'If you are cross, I shall go to the terrace and leave Oliver to his fate,' said Kitty, laughing and escaping.

The two who were left looked at each other as she ran off—he with open admiration, she with a tremulous quiver of her lips not lost upon him. Oliver Trent was a man of about five and thirty, tall and thin, with dead, dusty-coloured hair; his features were not ill-looking, but, as Bice had remarked, hard in their lines, and he spoke with a slow sweet-

ness curiously out of keeping with his face. He now slowly repeated—

'To my fate. I wonder if Kitty quite understood what happy prognostications lay in her words? Yes, this is the fate I have been looking forward to all these weary weeks; and I began to think, Bice, that you delighted in cruelty, or else had learned the woman's art of tantalising. Come and sit here in the shade.'

She followed him more readily than he, perhaps, expected, for he half-suspected that she was bent upon avoiding a tête-à-tête; but in actual truth she had scarcely heard his words, or at any rate had not taken in their meaning. Another thought possessed her. As they sat down she turned and looked steadily into his face.

'What is Clive's exact position?' she said sharply.

He hesitated. She repeated the question.

- 'You had better not ask for particulars, for they can only give you pain.'
  - 'I can bear pain.'
- 'Yes,' he said, glancing at her hand, 'such pain as that; but there are other and worse pangs, and from those, Bice, I shall always endeavour to shield you. Clive has been doing his utmost to ruin himself and make you all miserable; I am trying to save him. It is a hard task, and unless you trust me and follow my directions, I tell you honestly that I have no chance of success.'
- 'You threaten us with shadows,' said the girl moodily.
- 'Oh, Bice,' he said—and his voice became yet softer and more slow—' you are not yourself to-day. What has changed you? I have often found you hasty, wilful, unreasonable, but never before ungenerous. Is it I that threaten? Is it not rather I that at any cost am trying to keep the danger a shadow?

Once let me remove my hand, and it will be real and tangible enough.'

She could not endure such a reproach; it seemed horrible to her, and also true. She stretched out her hand to him with a quick gesture of kindness.

- 'You have been our very good friend, I know, Oliver,' she said, looking at him gratefully, 'and I ought to be content and not tease you. Only tell me, is it absolutely necessary there should be this secrecy?'
- 'Absolutely. I am obliged to use the greatest caution.'
- 'Out here, how would it be possible for us to interfere with any plans?'

He began to be vexed with her unusual importunity, but allowed no trace of his vexation to appear in his face or voice. On the contrary, he said with a smile, 'Excuse me; if there were no other way, I should feel by no means certain what you and Kitty

might not write to Clive. No. Complete ignorance is the safest state of things for you; for of one thing I am sure, nature never intended either of you for a conspirator.'

Bice turned and looked at him thoughtfully. He felt uneasy, for her eyes seemed to be asking whether it was for that he was intended. He said more abruptly than he had yet spoken—

'Do you not care any longer that Clive should be saved?'

'Do I not care!'

The sudden fire which leapt into her eyes answered him. He had at last touched the right string.

'You have considered it thoroughly?' he said, speaking deliberately again. 'I particularly desire that you should do so. If this act of Clive's is brought home to him, it means dishonour and disgrace; I cannot hide it from you. Your mother is very fond of

Clive, she will never hold up her head again. As for Kitty, you know best whether she will care or not. It may not be so bad for you, it is true, because you bear another name.'

Bice interrupted him in a low passionate voice.

- 'You shall not say that!'
- 'You refuse to separate yourself from them? Well, then, for you too the shame and the disgrace. And poor Clive, so young, so foolish, not wicked, but led away. He writes to you all, I know, as if nothing had happened, but if you could see him as I do, you would long to save him!'
  - 'You must save him.'

The girl's voice was choked. Oliver leant forward and looked at her.

- 'At all costs?'
- 'At all costs.'
- 'And by all means, whether right or wrong?'

'Whether right or wrong.'

He leant forward still further and forced her to look at him.

'I will,' he said slowly. 'For you.'

They were silent after that for a time. He felt that he had won a victory, but her moods were so changeful that he was afraid of endangering it by trying to push his advantage further. And yet he wanted more. More than ever since this other man, of whom he felt insanely jealous, had appeared on the scene. At this moment, when her feelings were all stirred and thrilled, he knew that skilfully led she would be capable of any self-sacrifice, that it would even have an attraction for her. Once get her to make a definite promise, and he felt certain the generosity of her nature would keep her to And once his—he looked at her beautiful face, grew pale, and set his teeth-he would make her love him: his work should not be left half done.

Now, if ever, was his time.

He said presently, in a pained and gloomy tone—

- 'I could almost envy Clive.'
- 'Why?' she said, looking round quickly.
- 'Clive, and Kitty, and your mother. Do you ever think of anyone else? Would you care if I—we—the rest of the world were swept away in a common deluge? Would it matter to you in the least, supposing you four were safe?'
- 'You are very unjust, Oliver,' she said in a low tone, and he saw tears shining in her eyes.
- 'I think not,' he said gently. 'So long as I can save Clive you are quite willing for me to run any risk—and the risk is great, remember. I am a chancery barrister, working upwards with quite my share of difficulties. Suppose my attempt fails—yes, it is always necessary to look what one undertakes in the face.'

'Clive would be ruined,' she said as he paused. Then, as he did not speak, she looked at him again and saw him smiling. 'What do you mean?' she said half angrily.

'What did I tell you?' he answered. 'It was not of Clive that I was speaking at that moment but of myself. I should be ruined as effectually as Clive, but that, of course, is not worth mentioning,' She started from her seat as if she had been stung, but he laid his hand on her arm and drew her down again beside him. 'Wait a moment, Bice,' he said in a changed voice, 'wait and listen; I have a right at least to ask so much from you. I am not saying this to you because I have any dream of retracting my promise; it is given, and there is an end of scruple. It is dangerous, perhaps wrong; I shall have to use means that I detest, and mix myself up with scoundrels who will be on the look-out to catch me tripping-never

mind. I have promised. Only understand what it is you ask me to do, and understand also that I do it for you—solely and entirely for you. What is Clive to me? Nothing. Do you suppose that one's cousins are so dear that one would risk reputation and honour for them. But what are you to me? Everything. Everything in the whole world, and you know it, you know it. Have you no word for me? Am I to sacrifice everything and to have nothing in return? Bice, Bice, can't you give anything for Clive?'

She was looking straight before her, the colour had faded out of her face; his voice, dangerously low and sweet, sounded in her ears. All her life long she never forgot that moment. Long afterwards, if she shut her eyes, she could see the great leaves of the trees of Paradise swaying backwards and forwards against the deep blue sky; a vine, golden in the sunshine; a pumpkin with its odd parti-

coloured gourds flinging itself down a steep bank; a clump of lilac crocuses breaking through the grass-her eyes wandered over them all while he waited for her answer. She knew quite well what it must be; her poor little generous untaught heart had felt all the time he was speaking that he had a right so to speak, that it was not for her to hold back. Never before had it seemed to her so terrible—Oliver would have been bitterly disappointed had he known—but not for that could she hesitate. She hated herself because the sacrifice seemed so unendurable. Why did she not speak? What years were dragging slowly by while he waited, holding her hand in his-waited, waited!

There was a rush, a swoop. A great black dog came tearing through the bushes, springing upon Bice. Old Andrea followed, breathless and panting.

- 'He is a demon, that dog of the English signore,' he cried, 'and he has lost his master. Signorina, for pity's sake take him where he is, or he will knock the house down. He has been in my kitchen and gobbled up a heap of amoretti, and broken half the eggs, and upset the milk, and before that he had frightened the padrona out of her senses. Che, che, che, we cannot have such doings! Signorina, where is his master?'
- 'He is gone,' said Bice, jumping up; 'he has been gone a long time. What shall we do, Andrea? Can one of the men take him into Florence?'
- 'Would he go?—the signorina should rather ask that question. Otherwise the cart from the *podere* is here, going in with a couple of pigs that have been sold. But the creature would not follow.'
  - 'Then we must tie him to the back.'
  - 'Già, già, that is it, the signorina has

always got her ideas.' Old Andrea, who had recovered his good humour, stood shaking his broad shoulders and pointing at Cartouche, who kept close to Beatrice. 'And he really is clever, too, he knows he has found a friend. Come along, come along, signorina mia.'

'Yes, I must go,' she said, almost angrily.
'Don't you see they cannot manage him
by themselves. Come, Cartouche; come,
Andrea.'

She ran towards the house, the dog fol-

lowed her, leaping and barking. Oliver turned sharply away and went to the Virgin's He wanted to see if she had really taken fresh flowers there. Had Ibbetson helped her; was she playing a double game? He stood for some time thinking, his head bent and a frown on his face; and while he was there, a cart came jolting down the white and stony road. Behind it, and dragged unwillingly along, was poor Cartouche on his way to his home. Bice was walking by his side to console him for a little part of the road by encouraging words. She did not see Oliver Trent, nor hear his exclamation of rage, but she looked like a creature who had escaped to freedom, and had thrown off a burden. He was half disposed to follow her, but something seemed to warn him that the spell was broken, and must be re-woven before he could succeed.

Perhaps people do not very often-

except, indeed, in books—lay those elaborate schemes, those widely-spread toils of villainy, which are supposed to belong to a bad man's career. It is probable that they open out to them almost as unexpectedly as to us, time and opportunity seeming to throw themselves on their side. Certainly Trent, who was growing more involved week by week, had laid no such plans when he took his first step; nay, more, he was made very uneasy by a clear perception of the dangers to which he was exposing himself as he went on. would gladly have pulled himself up before, and looked forward almost feverishly to laying down the net which he told himself he was forced to weave, with the full intention of never again engaging in such rash work. He had no dislike of Clive to make it easier to do him a mischief, though he salved his conscience in the curious short-sighted way in which that work is often done, telling himself that the means he was obliged to use would not really injure the young man, although they might seem to cloud his prospects for a time—nay, he sometimes almost succeeded in assuring himself that they were likely to work for Clive's advantage, giving him just the lesson he needed, and putting him through a wholesome time of trial. But as this view of himself as a kind of abstract justice was one which no effort could keep always in the position where he would have liked to find it, he was subject to fits of impatience, wishing very heartily that he could reach his end and wash his hands of all this miserable business, which both irritated and annoyed him. When he had reached the villa he had confidently looked forward to being free in a week. And already he was feeling as if his acts were turning into scourges. Yet he had no thought of giving up Bice; the more he saw her, the more youth, are never lost, or even for a moment forgotten. And therefore autumn brings no dread, only its own rich fruition and the joy of fulfilled toil.

As they drove down from the villa into Florence on the Sunday morning, the beauty of the time seemed at its height. The road, after descending between the high walls over which here and there the roses thrust themselves, branched off and ran gaily down to the Arno and to Florence through bordering vineyards, where the purple and yellow grapes hung in luminous clusters between the intense fresh green of their leaves as they tossed themselves from one tall tree to another against a clear brightness of sky. All round lay the soft and delicate glory of the mountains, and below them the town glowed white in the sunshine, even the cool shadows on the towers and walls gleaming with a strange translucent golden pink. There are no words for such colours; they burn and blend, everything is touched with an enchanter's wand; it is only when you try to hold them fast, or come away to our cold greens and greys, that you learn something of their power.

Oliver Trent had done his utmost to get Bice again by herself, but she had as yet contrived to avoid him, and he was a good deal more disquieted by her doing so than he ventured to show; for hers was not a nature which it would be safe to stir into opposition, or to attempt to intimidate, and he had studied her closely enough to be aware that she would resent nothing so much as suspicion or distrust. Every hour that passed endangered his plans, and yet he could do nothing but wait. He was even obliged to see them drive off to Casa Giulia after service without him, as he was to go to other friends, and to meet them afterwards at Miss Cartwright's. All that he could do was to whisper into Bice's ear, as he put her into the carriage, 'Remember,' and then he stood and watched them go with a black cloud on his face, which he no longer troubled himself to mask.

Bice's spirits rose as they left him behind; at any rate, she was free for a few hours. The sun was shining, the bands were playing, all Florence was alive with gaiety, and the girl's Italian blood leapt into answering life. Something else, too, there was, another spring of joy, none the less real that it was hidden away from touch or sight—was she not going where Jack would be? would she not at least see him, and hear his kind voice? He had not helped her as she had hoped, she acknowledged to herself. She could read in his face only strong condemnation of Clive and contempt for his weakness, and condemnation and contempt seemed to leave the burden . just where it was before. But she forgot all that now. She was content to ask herself no questions, to take the joy of the moment. She had seen him in the distance, at church, with some ladies; and as she thought of him, such a sweet and gentle expression stole into her face, that the people who looked at her smiled with the ready sympathy of their country.

'She is a girl, and she is happy,' said old Bertuccia, who on week-days sits in the Borgo Ognissanti, near the church, selling her flowers and vegetables.

A brown old man who was standing by chuckled.

'Altro! But where is he?' he said, and they all laughed.

Miss Cartwright was at home alone, she had not been well enough to go to church, and a hot, nervous flush was on her cheeks when she arose to receive three strangers. But Bice's face, its beauty, its happiness, won

her heart at once. Jack, who, in spite of his condemnation, had been greatly touched by the pathetic little story, had asked her to be kind to the girl, and though this radiant beauty was different from her expectations, it was charming in itself. When Jack came in, after taking the others to the hotel, he found them on the best of terms. Even Miss Preston thawed at intervals, especially when Mrs. Masters showed a docile inclination to adopt her favourite prescription for a chill. Cartouche welcomed them with patronising dignity. There was a striped awning running out from the window, and under this they sat and chatted. It seemed to Bice like a little haven of rest and kindness, for, perhaps unfortunately, Ibbetson took particular care that she should be looked after and amused. Presently they went for luncheon into the cool little dining-room. Miss Cartwright asked her nephew a question in a low voice, and

Bice heard him say that they were all coming by-and-by. Who were they, she wondered; little knowing, poor child, what the knowledge would cost her. Then there were other questions. Miss Cartwright was interested about the old villa and their solitary life; Miss Preston was alarming Mrs. Masters by searching demands for statistics of the farm expenses, of the vintage.

'Beatrice is my manager,' said her mother apologetically. 'I was never a woman of business, or able to understand accounts. Fortunately she has taken to that sort of thing from the time she was a child. But we shall soon be going to Rome, for we have let the villa for a few months, and shall spend that time with a relation of the Capponis.'

'You are going to Rome?' said Ibbetson to Bice, with interest. 'Then we shall meet, for I too am to be there this winter.' He hesitated whether he would or would not

say 'after my marriage,' but he did not add the words, and the girl looked up brightly.

'Oh, I am glad!' she said in a shy, quick voice.

How swiftly the moments flew! Every now and then a thought of Oliver and of Clive forced its way up into her mind, but she crushed it down again before it had time to shape itself—for this one half-day she would be free, she would be happy. Kitty, who had seen her the night before, looked with wonder at her smiles.

They were in the garden again when four more people arrived—Captain Leyton, his wife, Phillis Grey, and Mr. Trent. When Bice saw Oliver, a sudden sickness seemed to overpower her, but she was still bent upon defying fate; and when he made his way to her side as if to claim her, she turned away with something more like a movement of dislike than she had ever yet shown to him.

That he saw it was evident, for he drew back at once, but it was with a smile on his lips which a close observer might have called triumphant.

'The world is so small,' some one was proclaiming. 'Who would have supposed that Mr. Trent, whom we met at Bologna, and who lunched with us to-day, would have been coming to this very house on quite another account? It is almost provoking, I think, the way everybody knows everybody. One can never make discoveries on one's own account.'

Mrs. Leyton, who said this, was a fair, bright-faced woman, with a wish to be pathetic and a face which belied the attempt. She was a very popular person, for she had the power of adapting herself readily to those in whose society she happened to find herself, and was never unwilling to do a little kindness.

'I can't quite agree with you, Mrs. Leyton,' said Trent, in his deliberate voice. 'It seems to me just the means by which one can make discoveries.'

'What does the fellow mean?' said Jack to himself. 'He looks as hard at me as if he had raked out an escaped convict. Why did Phillis not tell me they had met him?'

When they first came into the room, Phillis sat down close to the door, and Ibbetson only nodded to her, and went on talking to Bice. Kitty was nearest to her, and the two began to talk, shyly, and with many pauses. Cartouche rushed up to Phillis and lay down at her feet. Miss Preston looked first at her, then at Bice, and shook her head. Certainly the contrast was great. Bice's beautiful face was sparkling, her eyes were bright and soft, her colour came and went; it was like watching the changing lights of a spring day, there was so

much youth and sweet freshness in the face. Phillis looked still and grave by comparison. No one could have called her beautiful, many the reverse. She was pale, and her features were irregular, her mouth large, though her teeth were charming, and her eyes clear brown, such as one sees sometimes in a dog—as honest and as faithful. Bice, looking at her once when she was smiling at Kitty, was struck by the feeling of restfulness which her face suggested; it smote her own poor little storm-tossed heart with a sharp pang of envy.

- 'Who is that lady? Is she one of your party?' she said quickly to Jack.
- 'Miss Grey? Yes. You will see her in Rome also,' he said, rather oddly, Bice thought.
- 'I am glad of that,' said the girl with a sigh; 'she looks as if she could help one.'

It was proposed presently that some of

them should go to the American Church, on the other side of the Arno, for the afternoon Mrs. Masters was afraid of the walk, and would stay with Miss Cartwright, the others set out. The day was cooler, and the Lung' Arno was crowded with gay people strolling down to the Cascine. It was like plunging from the present into the past, to cross the river and reach the dark dirty little streets which lead to the Carmine Church. Captain Leyton dragged a wellworn Baedeker out of his pocket and turned in there, where Masaccio's frescoes glow in soft sad colours in his chapel, and the old beggars keep guard over the doors; the rest of the party were faithful to their aim, and went on to the little whitewashed building close by.

He rejoined them when they came out, and they wound through more dark crooked historic streets—streets where, as you pass,

memories jostle you, and the famous dead come to life again, streets which are gloomy and yet brightened by flashes of gay colour; until they came to the Pitti, and so on to the Old Bridge. There, on either side, are the goldsmiths' shops, which long years have kept unchanged, where, in little dens scarcely big enough to hold their master, twisted coils of yellow-looking pearls hang in long loops, and diamonds flash, and forget-me-nots of blue turquoises are heaped up; while behind, the quaint buildings bulge out in all sorts of strange shapes, with red roofs stuck on, and rooms hanging over those great stone arches under which Arno comes swooping down in all his winter strength and fulness. there, in the centre, is the opening through which Tito leapt to his death, hounded on by the people behind him, the opening through which you may see the sunset lights softly touching the Carrara mountains, and

turning the muddy river into a tawny sheet of gold.

To Bice it was full of strange new beauty; it seemed to her as if she had never known before what it was like. Ibbetson had been separated from her when they came out from the church, and had walked for a little while with Phillis, but he had come back to her again, and talked quietly and kindly. Phillis and Beatrice were not very much thrown together, but the girl often looked at the other, whose face attracted her powerfully. She noticed, too, that when information was wanted, if Phillis were asked she invariably had it to give, and she said something of the sort to Jack.

'Is it so?' he said, with a little surprise in the question. 'I had no notion Miss Grey had had time to read up much about the place.'

Mr. Trent kept out of Bice's way, it seemed as if nothing were to interfere with

her happiness, or as if, by sheer force of will, she were able to ward off whatever threatened. They were to drive back in the cool evening, and when they reached Casa Giulia, there was tea, and more sitting about in the pleasant drawing-room or under the glossy magnolias. Somehow or other, Ibbetson was generally near Bice. He had no intention of neglecting Phillis, but the last few days had thrown him into another circle of interests from which she was shut out, and the strong pity he felt for Bice demanded a good deal of attention for her-or so he thought. He was pretty sure, too, that Phillis would have shrunk from any open appearance of claiming her on his part, she was to oshy to stand it. 'And, after all, she has got what she wants,' he said in his heart with a bitterness which was not like himself. but which showed itself when he thought of Hetherton.

It was settled that they should all drive out to the villa on Tuesday and see something of the vintage, which would be at its height in the vineyards. Then the carriage came round and the little party separated. Florence was no longer white but golden, and there was a sort of golden mist before Bice's eyes as they drove away into the Cascine woods. Was it over? Had it been no more than a dream, and was she going back to a reality which grew darker and darker every hour? Her heart cried out in passionate denial. Clive should be saved by other means-for she was in one of those moods when anything seems possible-and she would act in defiance of Oliver. looked at him as she made the resolution. and it is possible that he read the defiance in her eyes. But for the moment he did nothing more than address a few languid remarks to Mrs. Masters, who was getting drowsy.

They went climbing slowly up the stony roads, through the vineyards. The glow faded away, a fragrant stillness seemed to rest; here and there an olive tree stretched out its grey and solemn boughs. Only once they passed a peasant; he had his dog with him, and a gun, and was perhaps going home from watching the vines. No one had spoken for at least ten minutes, when Oliver Trent touched Kitty.

'Are you dreaming, too?' he asked softly.
'Wake up, child, you are too young to be tired and sleepy with the rest of us. And I have not inquired how you enjoyed your day, or how you liked my Bologna acquaintances? It is strange, is it not, that your new friend, Mr. Ibbetson, should have been travelling with them? Leyton told me the reason, he is engaged to Miss Grey, and they are to be married very shortly.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

## 'BLUE BUBBLES OF GRAPES DOWN A VINEYARD ROW.'

The cleverest men make mistakes, and Oliver Trent had made a second. He had not told Bice his news about Ibbetson cruelly, or in such a manner as to force her to feel that either by start or word she had revealed to another the secret of which she had not actually been conscious until that moment. He had only mentioned it in her hearing, when the dusk of evening was there to hide any sign of emotion, treating it as a trivial matter with which Kitty was at least as much concerned as she, and he had talked on so as to give her time to recover her composure. His mistake

lay in telling her at all. A woman who has received a wound of this kind may be brave enough to hide the wound, but she never forgets the hand that has wounded her. To the day of her death its touch recalls something of the sharpness of the first pang.

No one saw much of Bice through the next day. Trent let her alone, having a perception that she would not brook interference, and that, at whatever cost, he must be patient. Mrs. Masters, when he asked her, said that she had taken Andrea's daughter, Chiara, and had gone up to the podere to speak about the vintage.

'You let her do too much of that sort of work,' said Trent, frowning.

'How can I help it?' asked Mrs. Masters, moving uneasily in her chair. 'She has been accustomed to it ever since she was a child. I am quite unfitted for it, and, as you know, it is impossible for me to keep an

agent. This poverty is odious. I suppose we shall save something this winter by letting the villa, and living with the Capponis in Rome; otherwise I have spent all the money you lent me, and have never even dared tell Bice I had it from you.'

- 'And how do you mean to help Clive?'
- 'I cannot, I cannot!' she said, beginning to cry helplessly. 'How is it possible? You will do something for the poor boy, Oliver?'
  - 'Why?'
  - 'Why?'

She looked at him in bewilderment.

'He is my cousin, certainly,' he said with a touch of sarcasm in his voice, 'but, on the whole, I have a good many cousins, and have never committed myself to the idea that I was bound to be general guardian and protector to all the young idiots among them who run their heads against stone walls. I don't even profess to be a benevolent philanthropist. I

have told you before that I will do what I can for Clive on one condition—that Bice marries me. You had better urge her not to keep me too long in suspense. Patience is not my chief virtue.'

'I will, indeed-to-day.'

'Not to-day,' said Oliver, considering.
'To-morrow. Say as much as you like about Clive, but do not let her know I have desired you to speak to her. And stay, you had better own that you have borrowed money from me.'

'It will make her so angry,' said Mrs. Masters piteously.

'No matter, I wish her to know the fact. You will want more, I suppose, when Bice is my wife, and you will not find me ungenerous.'

He left her crying, but her tears lay very near the surface, and he was not even made uncomfortable by them. It was curious how, in a scene of this sort, all his softness of manner and voice seemed, without any remarkable change, to become frozen or petrified, so as to give the impression that it was in vain to attempt to affect him. He had been disappointed when he came back to find Bice a little further from him than when he had left her, and he was determined to risk everything to put matters on a secure footing. Why should they not marry at once?

As for Bice, she was not angry, as he had hoped, or even hurt, her dream having been too short and vague for any hopes to have actually shaped themselves in her heart. She was conscious that during the last few days some sweet atmosphere had seemed to have surrounded her, and that suddenly, after Trent's words to Kitty the evening before, a dull weight had fallen which told her what it all meant. Her heart ached with the burden of this weight, but the poor child did not cry

out against any other for having brought it on her. She was humble with all her pride. Nobody's fault, only a man's kindness and a girl's mistake—a common story enough; something which a day had brought and long years must carry as bravely as they could, and without a word. She thought of Phillis without any bitterness of jealousy. He had been hers all the time, nothing to any one She walked on and else—that was all. on, up the steep hill, through the pleasant grassy paths between the vines. Chiara toiled after, chattering, exclaiming, every now and then when she stumbled or grew hot, saying, Florentine fashion, naughty things of the Madonna or the saints.

It was the time which, of all the times of the year, Bice loved the best. As she turned into a larger vineyard, its exceeding beauty flashed upon her in spite of her heavyheartedness. It was as well kept, as daintily trim as a garden, only the vines swept freely from tree to tree, climbing, curving, flinging their long tendrils, with all the bounty of unchecked luxuriance. The sun was shining on the gleaming leaves, on the purple and yellow splendours of the fruit, on the women's gay dresses as they stood under the trees and caught the branches which the men cut off with their sickles. Carts, painted in brightest vermilion, stood in the cool shadows of higher trees, the beautiful white oxen, with soft eyes and huge wide-stretching horns, waiting patiently until their rich load was ready. padrona was welcomed volubly; the contadino in charge brought a couple of great bunches for her and for Chiara; the whole scene was so gay, so busy, and so bright, that poor Bice, who had come with a sort of determination to seek what might change her thoughts, turned away sick at heart. not only the fading of a shadowy dream; something there was more tangible, more oppressive; her own fate seemed to be closing round her; with the shattering of her visions had come the keener realisation of what hung over her—of Clive, of Oliver. All the pretty sights and sounds jarred. She gave her orders, and called Chiara away from her chatter, and went home, avoiding them all, or keeping Kitty close by her side whenever it became absolutely necessary to meet Oliver. That she must yield she did not doubt. All her castings about for deliverance from her doom seemed childish and hopeless. She must yield, but she clung to every hour gained as an infinite boon.

To-morrow, perhaps. Not at any rate to-day.

To-morrow, which must be so full of pain that a little more or less would scarcely be noted, and yet to which her foolish heart was flinging itself forward, dreading and longing for. After they had come and gone, after she had seen Jack once more, she thought she could do what had to be done, but not till then.

Phillis was looking with great interest at the old villa when they drove up to it early the next day. Miss Cartwright was not strong enough to venture on the drive, but Miss Preston was there laden with projects for the moral improvement of the contadini, and bent upon collecting a fund of valuable information as to the vintage of Tuscany and its shortcomings. Cartouche, with his head full of sweet recollections of amoretti, plunged at once into the thicket of scarlet geraniums which led down to Andrea's domain, and presently they heard the old cook's voice raised in high indignation as he drove him out. Captain Leyton was very much delighted with his own prospects. He was slung all over with sketch-books and waterbottles, and carried a great white sunshade with a pointed stick.

'Capital bits about the place, capital bits,' he said cheerfully. 'Nice tone of colour, plaster peeling off, fine arch, acanthus leaves against the stone—plenty to do here, and no mistake.'

As they went into the house the sisters met them in the hall; Bice paler, and without the radiance of the day in Florence, but quiet and smiling. She gave one long and rather wistful look at Phillis, and Phillis noticed and flushed slightly under it.

'Will you come to the little room?' she said. 'My mother is there, for the steps outside the window are cooler than any other place at this time of day.'

She had scarcely spoken to Jack, and when she moved away he followed her with a dissatisfied feeling. As they passed through the silence of the great rooms he could not help contrasting this day with the first on which he had seen her, when he had been alone with her, and her frank determination had made him smile. Miss Preston, who was close to him now, was a very unwelcome substitute.

'It is too distressing,' she was saying in a sharp undertone. 'I have always known that the Italians had no idea of what was fitting, but not a carpet, not so much as a hearth-rug!'

'How would it answer to speculate in a few, and to bring them out for the good of this benighted people?' asked Jack dreamily.

Meanwhile Mrs. Leyton, who liked it all, was genuinely enthusiastic.

'What a room for a dance! You do dance here, don't you?'

'Oh, yes! Sometimes Kitty and I dance together, or the Moronis come over, and then we are more,' said Bice simply. 'If you would like it, by-and-by we can wheel in the piano, and I will play for you.' But seeing an irrepressible smile in Mrs. Leyton's face, she coloured and said hotly, 'You think us foolish—you don't do such things in England!'

It was Phillis who came to the rescue, eagerly and yet a little shyly.

'If we don't, it is not that you are foolish, only wiser than we are, and lighter-hearted. It takes a great deal to make us dance in England——'

'Lights and music and a month's preparation, and then enough people to prevent the risk of anyone being seen,' added Jack. 'Your plan is much the most sensible, Miss Masters. But you see we have all been brought up to think it a serious matter, and so for the moment you shocked our prejudices.'

But Bice was vexed. It always vexed

her that anything, however slight, should mark her as un-English in her ways. She walked gravely through the other rooms holding her head with a little haughtiness. It passed, however, directly they had joined her mother and Oliver Trent in the smaller room—she was watching Ibbetson and Phillis.

Phillis, as often seemed the case, happened to be a little apart from the others. She sat quietly, saying little herself, but evidently interested in what was going on. Twice Bice saw her, apparently unperceived by the others, do a trifling kindness; once in disentangling Miss Preston's veil which was in danger of being torn, and once in placing outside the window a stray butterfly which was blundering up and down against the glass. But she seemed to have a little difficulty in joining the gay-spirited chat which flowed with unbroken ease from Mrs. Leyton, and if Jack addressed her, she showed a

greater hesitation. Here was no secure and haughty rival to sting poor Bice by contempt; the girl, who would have had the worst side of her nature roused by such treatment, felt for Phillis a strange thrill of pitying sympathy. Yet pitying is hardly the right word. There was something about her which Bice envied, a kind of sweet dignity, of self-possession, in spite of shyness.

Captain Leyton very soon began to fidget over his opportunities.

- 'And if he once sits down to a sketch there will be no moving him!' said his wife with good-humoured impatience.
- 'Let somebody suggest a means of prevention, then,' said Jack. 'You shall have mine first—the vineyards.'
  - 'Perhaps that would be the best plan.'
- 'You will miss the long shadows,' Bice said doubtfully.
  - 'But we shall get them in this enchanting

garden,' exclaimed Mrs. Leyton. 'I know exactly how it will be with Arthur otherwise. Cart ropes won't drag him away when once he has begun a sketch.'

She had her way, as she generally had, and the eight started, a merry party to all appearance, though there were doubts and heart sinkings pressing heavily on more than one of the eight. Cartouche was left behind, to his great disgust, but too many dogs were employed in the vineyards for it to be safe to take him.

- 'It always seems strange to me that your vineyards should be so undefended,' Jack said, determined to speak to Bice. 'Have you such perfect trust in the honesty of your fellow-creatures?'
- 'Touch a grape and you will see,' answered the girl briefly.
  - 'What shall I see?'
  - 'A man with a gun. And he will be

quite ready to use it. The very dogs are trained to watch.'

'You excite my curiosity. I shall experimentalise to-day.'

'To-day you will be safe, because you will be with the *padrona*. But I do not advise you to try elsewhere.'

He noticed with vexation that her manner was abrupt, and that she evidently tried to avoid him. Had anything offended her? He determined to win her back to the easy frankness which he had found so charming that he had no mind to part with it.

'So that is why Cartouche was not allowed to come?' he said with a smile. 'Do you know how he distinguished himself last night? Somehow or other he got on the roof and sat there. Quite a crowd gathered round the house before we had any idea what was the attraction, and Winter, my aunt's maid, went into hysterics. But I assure you

his effect among the chimneys was absolutely demoniacal.'

She smiled, but she was looking straight before her. Why did not some one join them? she thought with a throb. Why did he talk to her? Why was fate so cruel and yet so sweet that she could not get away from it? Apparently her coldness only provoked Jack, who wanted nothing more than her past friendliness, but thought himself illused at its withdrawal. He said at last boldly—

'Something has vexed you. What is it? Has anything fresh turned up about your brother?'

She coloured and caught at his second question, feeling that sooner than let her secret betray itself she would talk with him, walk with him, and endure any torture.

'Nothing new,' with a faltering voice.
'We have not heard again from Clive, any of

us. But it is impossible to forget; and oh, Mr. Ibbetson, I wanted to say that I have thought it over a great deal—I mean what you were so kind as to suggest the other day. But it is impossible; it is of no use. Nothing seems as if it could be of use.' She corrected herself. 'I should not say that; Mr. Trent will do his utmost.'

'Anyone would do his utmost,' said Jack, more warmly than he need have spoken. It was almost impossible for poor Bice to repel his eagerness and kindness. They were a little in advance of the others, the path went twisting and clambering upwards. Once, perhaps because she was not thinking of the rough stones, she slipped, and he put out his hand and caught hers. It was not for more than a minute, but those behind saw the movement. Jack did not know it himself, but this shrinking, this apparent coldness of the girl's, was stirring him to a stronger

All his life as yet he had had interest. pretty much what he cared for—liking, popularity, success; finally, a fortune and a wife were waiting for him. The things had come too easily, so that a charm was wanting in them all. It piqued and roused him when he found a difficulty in the way. If he had known what he was heaping up for Bice it would have shocked him. She did know, and had thought that she would avoid him; but he would not be avoided, he was bent, as it seemed, upon monopolising her. The poor child was bewildered, miserable, happy, all at once. Trent, who had fancied he had stopped it, was furious.

Along the slopes of those hills of Florence there are lovely delicate colours and sweet pastoral pictures meeting you at every turn. Looking upwards you see Pan leaning against a tree, his goats browsing round him, over his head a vine is flinging itself from

bough to bough. Grey olives clothe the slopes; a sombre cypress rises like a sharp blot against the blue; an ox-cart comes rumbling down the road; far away in the plain the river shines till the mountains rise up beyond. In the vineyard to which they went that day you may look along a broad grass walk for a quarter of a mile at least; on either side of it the vines clamber from tree to tree, and at the end rises a distant line of Apennines, glowing faintly purple in the sunshine; the grapes—white, pink, yellow, purple, black-gleam with the most exquisite lights, the very shade seems to be lit up by them, luminous colours flash out from under fresh leaves, from wreaths of cool foliage.

Captain Leyton was in an ecstasy of despair. The head *contadino* came up to Bice smiling and showing his white teeth.

'Are there any grapes in particular the

signorina would like for her friends?' he asked.
'The biggest of all this year is Il Bordone.'

And then at a sign one of the men in the trees cut a branch or two with his sickle. Miss Preston began to demand particulars.

'The signora will see,' said the *contadino*, rather perplexed. 'The women carry the grapes to the tubs; there is one close by which is just full.'

He was right. A girl had just brought the last load of long festooning branches to a tall wooden tub. She was cutting off the bunches with her sickle, and letting them drop among the others already piled high, a mass of beautiful colours. Then a man, standing by and leaning on a thick stick, began to thump and beat them down into a pulpy mass. Miss Preston was very much interested; Phillis turned away, she could not bear to look at all the beauty beaten out of shape. She strolled into a little grassy side

path from which, out of the way, she could see the gay and busy scene. Two men passed her presently carrying the tub, suspended from a stick, to the ox-carts which stood, brilliant bits of colour, in the shade. Phillis was left quite to herself; every now and then she caught a glimpse of one of the party crossing an alley, moving here and there among the vines and the sweet changeful lights. She saw Jack and Bice together; he was bending down and speaking. The beauty of everything seemed to add to the pain in Phillis's heart. If we want to describe pain we are inclined to throw its gloom upon all the surroundings, to paint the outward signs of sadness in greys and dim cheerless But who knows whether to an aching heart the glow of sunshine and the fairness of nature do not bring the keenest sting of all?

Phillis's pain was full of perplexity. She

wanted to be sure what was right, what was best for Jack, and for all. Her nature was altogether true, simple, and free from the snare of self-torment, so that she was spared many doubts in her life; only at this time they seemed to gather about her like a mist. She knew little of the world. Mrs. Thornton was her aunt, she had lived at Hetherton since she had been a child, and Mr. Thornton was fond of her in his rough way, and had made out this plan of his with a good deal of satisfaction.

'Two disinterested young fools,' he had said to himself, chuckling, 'or at any rate they think themselves so. Play them off against one another. See if that don't bring them together.'

As it did.

Only it gave Jack the unjust impression that Phillis was swayed by the desire to keep her position, and left him quite unconscious that to her the threat of disinheriting him had But, indeed, for her no threat been used. was needed. Jack had been her hero from the time when she looked shyly at the big, fair-haired boy from the school-room It amazed her when he asked her window. to marry him, but she took his words with the simple trust which belonged to her character, and was quite content to be happy. Should she have done otherwise? she thoughtlooking back with a vague uneasiness. For, alas, she had begun to doubt, to wonder. the long days of travelling together, in the letters he had written, something had forced itself upon her. Perhaps he had hardly cared it should be otherwise, hardly wished to profess more than the quiet liking he unquestionably felt, had no misgivings that she herself would desire more. At any rate she had reached Florence in some perplexity of mind,

and by this time imagined that she had found the solution of her riddle.

It was curious how little Ibbetson knew of her true character. He believed her to be easily influenced by stronger wills, and, indeed, to require some such support. In reality her judgment was clear, and, once formed, no pain would turn her from what she felt to be the right course. There, sitting between the vines, she set herself to consider it. Ibbetson did not love her, whether he loved another or not, it would be wrong for them to marry. No dreams of his or her inheritance must affect the question. No visions of self-sacrifice would be safe guides. went to work honestly, asking-how earnestly!-for the 'right judgment,' and she would not shrink though the answer came heavy with pain.

Phillis sat on, forgetting what was round her. The peasant girls looked with some

wonder at the signorina who stayed there away from all her party. Presently Jack, who had missed her, came to search for her, a little vexed with her and with himself. But Phillis showed no displeasure, she only rose with a smile and told him that she had been resting, but that she would not be unsociable any longer.

## CHAPTER IX.

## BICE WRITES.

OLIVER TRENT had been too much enraged by Ibbetson's monopolisation of Bice to be as prudent as was his wont; indeed, he began to feel as if he had been over cautious already, and that it would have been wiser to have checked matters more decidedly. She avoided him, but he was determined to give his warning, and when Jack went to seek Phillis he caught at the opportunity to say—

- 'New friends for old—is that your last motto, Bice?'
  - 'What do you mean?' she said, faltering.
- 'I mean that I could envy you your powers of forgetfulness if I did not unfor-

tunately happen to be one of the sufferers. Clive and I—have we really altogether dropped out of your mind?'

'You take care to prevent such a possibility, even for a moment,' she said angrily.

'Oh, I will not offend you again, if that is your feeling. I will leave Florence to-morrow morning, and nothing shall remind you of my existence. As for Clive, I am afraid I cannot make so large a promise.'

She was so changed and shaken, that for the first time in her life he frightened her. She felt as if she were powerless in a strong grasp. Where could she turn?

'Why do you say this to me, Oliver?' she said slowly. 'What have I done? I have not forgotten your goodness about Clive, or—what you said. Why should I? There is no one else to whom I can turn. But you—you should not oblige me to speak of it here, with all these people as our guests.'

She said the words very softly and gently, but she did not look at him as she spoke.

- 'When will you speak, then?' he said moodily. 'To-night?'
- 'Not to-night, not to-night, please! To-morrow.'
- 'I am tired of to-morrows. Why should it always be to-morrow? No. This evening in the garden.'

She did not contradict him any further. After all, it was hardly worth while.

Ibbetson could not get any more conversation with Bice on their way back to the villa, for Oliver quietly baffled his attempts, and Miss Preston was pouring out to every one her own views as to possible improvements in the vintage—the grapes should be trained differently, there should be a revolving wheel in the tubs, someone should read to the contadine.

and she

aid

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ilà ig 'Still I own to one improvement, for I am pleased to have had ocular demonstration that the barbarous fashion of treading out the grapes is no longer in practice. It gives one a certain hope.'

'But that is another stage,' exclaimed Kitty innocently; 'don't you know? They put the grapes into huge shallow tubs and jump on them till the juice is extracted. All the boys and girls help. After our share has been weighed in the cellar we shall make it at home.'

The little party were playing at cross purposes all the way back. Perhaps no one was content, not even Captain Leyton, who gazed moodily at a blot of green, purple, and golden, which was all he had got out of the vineyard. Bice looked pale and depressed, and said nothing to Oliver, who marched by her side all down the hill. Mrs. Leyton tried to draw a little amusement out of the others by talk-

ing of them to Phillis, but Phillis, too, was silent.

After luncheon they went different ways. Bice took Miss Preston, who was anxious, as she said, to make the round of the premises; Captain Leyton became supremely happy over a promising sketch; the others strolled or sat about, eating figs and peaches, Mr. Trent keeping near Jack, though with little pretence at cordiality. Phillis, who wanted time for herself, slipped away at last with Cartouche for a companion, and wandered about in the quiet alleys, of which there were so many. Suddenly she turned a corner and came upon Bice alone.

Something—stronger than circumstances—had all along attracted these two to each other. They were different, but each had a certain nobility of soul which may have had something to do with the attraction. Each had grown up out of the world, and though Bice

had had sharp experience of evil, it was not the evil of petty spites and jealousies. Then for Phillis beauty alone had that intense charm and interest which it often has for those who themselves lack its power, and she felt a strong pity for the girl who had looked sad all the day, and now had evidently been crying; a pity no less real because she believed that she herself must take up the burden of pain if she were to relieve it. She could not pass by, or pretend not to see.

'I am afraid you are unhappy,' she said gently. 'Mr. Ibbetson said that you were very anxious about your brother, but he told us no particulars. Is he ill, or is he in trouble? Can we help you in any way? I should be very glad if you would try not to look upon me as a stranger, although I know it is difficult.'

Bice, whose heart was in a tumult, who did not know what to think, who believed she

hated Oliver, Jack, Phillis, and herself most of all, was touched in a moment, not so much perhaps by the words, as by the kind, stedfast eyes which interpreted them.

'I don't think it is difficult,' she said, and with a sudden impulse she caught Phillis's hand and kissed her. 'Ever since I saw you I have felt somehow as if you would do us good.'

For the moment she had forgotten Jack. Phillis, who read more in the words than the girl meant, felt her heart swell.

'Perhaps I can,' she said steadily.
'Things often come about in the manner we least expect. Who knows whether you and I, if we put our heads together, may not find a way out of some of your troubles? Can you trust me with them?'

'Yes,' said Bice after a moment's pause.
'Oliver forbade me to speak, but I don't see that he knows best. I don't know who to

consult. I asked Mr. Ibbetson, and he seemed to think it all very bad indeed.' She went on hurriedly. 'There were some things I could not tell him—but you! Oh, I am very, very miserable. Do you think it will be very ungrateful of me if Mr. Trent saves Clive and yet I do not marry him?'

- 'Is that what he wishes?'
- 'Yes. He says he risks everything—that it is only for me.'
  - 'And you don't love him?'
  - 'Oh, no, no, no!'

The girl shivered as she spoke. There was a little pause, then Phillis said—

- 'How long has he been asking you to do this?'
- 'I don't know,' Bice said, letting her hands drop wearily. 'Ever since he brought us the bad news of Clive, I suppose. But it is in the last few days that he has said the most, and every day it seems to grow

worse and worse. To-night I must tell him.'

Phillis took her hands in hers and looked into her face.

'You must tell him you will not marry him,' she said quietly.

The girl's face flushed with sudden joy, then the colour faded quite away.

- 'Ah! you don't know,' she said, shaking her head.
- 'So much I do know. Nothing that you can tell me can make wrong right. But perhaps you will let me hear more.'
- 'Wrong?' repeated Bice, looking at her. To her, poor child, it seemed that she was only shrinking from a duty, from the stern call to self-sacrifice. That there could be any higher principle, that no aim, whether we call it self-sacrifice, or self-surrender, or anything else, can sanctify one step taken out of the right road, she did not realise. All her life

she had been brought up to think of right and wrong as having somewhat hazy outlines. As she told Clive's story over again, perhaps she dwelt more on the fear of disgrace than on his sin. But she could not help noticing the look of pain which gathered in Phillis's brown eyes. She stopped and sighed.

- 'Now you are shocked,' she said. 'So was Mr. Ibbetson. You think it is hopeless.'
- 'Wait a moment,' said Phillis, 'let me think.'

They walked on silently beneath the trees; the grass near them was lilac with autumnal crocuses, a great crimson rose swung itself down from a pole.

'I wonder if I am right,' Phillis said, hesitatingly. 'It seems to me there might be some mistake. Mr. Trent may not know, and you have no right to think hard things of your brother without proof. Surely you will ask him, ask him directly.'

## 'But Oliver said——'

'Oh, never mind,' said Phillis, with a touch of impatience. 'Tell him that you can't follow his advice in that respect. Suppose it is not so bad as he imagines, I don't see how you can expect Mr. Masters to forgive your want of confidence. No, be open and write. Perhaps he can clear himself. At any rate do not marry without love. If Mr. Trent is an honourable man, he will not attempt to take advantage of your anxiety.'

Phillis had not meant to say so much, but feeling strongly as to Mr. Trent's conduct, she could not abstain. An instinctive aversion had risen in her mind when she first saw him at Bologna, and this story of Bice's awoke more doubts, not to use the harsher word suspicions, than she liked to acknowledge even to herself. At the best his conduct was both ungenerous and unmanly.

Bice caught at her advice, which seemed to lift off some of her perplexities. She was very grave and quiet all the rest of the afternoon, keeping away as much as she could from both Jack and Oliver, and looking every now and then wistfully at Phillis. If she had known what Phillis, too, was thinking, what other resolutions had been made on that day, when doubts and fears seemed to be flying about in the air!

They dined at the marble table on the terrace, and the picture, with the piled-up fruits, the dancing shadows, was as pretty as when Jack first saw it, though he had a dissatisfied feeling of change. Cartouche sat on a balustrade, and caught grapes when anyone threw them to him. Captain Leyton was full of glee at having got one of the gardeners to stand as a foreground for his sketch. Trent looked uneasily at Bice; she was quieter, and did not shrink from his glance as she had

done in the morning, and he was not sure that it was a good sign.

She did not shrink either when they had watched the others drive away; on the contrary, she told Kitty she had something to say to Oliver, and herself led the way to a seat under the banksia trellis close to the pond, where yellow and white water lilies were still flowering. He watched her very closely. Her mood puzzled him, and he wanted her to be the first to speak. She did speak at last, without looking at him.

- 'You had something to say?'
- 'No,' he said quietly, 'nothing. You mistook my meaning, Bice. I have said my say, and that perhaps was more than was wise or prudent. But I do not regret it. I said it, and already have taken steps to carry out what I promised. I have nothing either to add or to retract. But you!—have you not tried me enough? Do you ever think of the

hours of torture you are inflicting?—such hours as to-day for instance, when I have been driven mad with doubts and fears? Is it not you who have something to say?'

She was silent. A month ago it would have been impossible for her to have listened unmoved to such an appeal, but a month ago she had never loved, and love—unreturned—hardens the heart strangely against another lover. His words seemed to her unreal and almost absurd. He put out his hand and took hers, and she caught it away angrily.

'Let me go, Oliver!' she exclaimed.

'Why do you turn from me, why do you hesitate?' he went on, in a voice which shook with his efforts at control. 'You cannot doubt my love, for I could hardly give you a greater proof than I am giving. Danger, risk of ruin, all would seem to me as absolutely nothing compared with one word from you; and though all I do I do for your sake,

you will not speak that word, Bice. Is this generous?'

- 'I don't wish you to run those risks.'
- 'Do you forget what you said? "At all risks." That was your request.'
- 'Then I was wrong, and you were wrong,' said the girl, more faintly.
  - 'Perhaps. But the alternative?'
- 'I have an alternative. I shall write to Clive.'

Oliver grew pale.

- 'You have, then, no more wish to save him?'
- 'He may not have done it, he may be able to explain, and it is shameful of us to condemn him unheard.'
- 'I warn you, Bice, that you will put it out of my power to save him.'
- 'We must run the risk,' she answered, in a low, resolute voice.

Oliver could scarcely restrain his passion.

He was certain that Ibbetson was at the bottom of her determination, and it seemed as if all his plots, his hopes, were to be baffled by this man. He longed to charge her with it, to taunt her with Jack's engagement, but he did not dare, for Bice's was not a nature which could be safely goaded into resentment, and he feared the flash of her eyes and what it might tell him. He controlled himself.

- 'Write, then,' he said, 'write at once. Clive will not acknowledge that anything is wrong.'
  - 'We shall see.'
- 'And am I still to be your shuttlecock?'
  he said hoarsely. 'Have pity, Bice, have pity!
  Such love as mine deserves some return—'

She interrupted him.

'It deserves to find love, I know, and that is what I have not got to give. I am very sorry, Oliver, only I must be true with you, at all costs.'

- 'You are rather late in your resolves,' he said, biting his lip until the blood sprang.
- 'I have thought and hoped,' she said, looking down, 'that one day I might feel differently, and be able to give you what you wanted, if only out of gratitude to you for your kindness. I thought, perhaps, it was that you had taken me by surprise, that I was ignorant and inexperienced, and that my feelings would change.'
- 'You were right!' he cried vehemently.
  'Think so still, Bice, my darling, my own!
  You do not know, how should you? Marry me, and I will teach you to love me. I have no fear, no doubt.'
- 'But now I know,' she said, going on as if he had not spoken, 'and it is all different. I can't marry you, even to save Clive. I could not even if I had promised. Do not be sorry, Oliver, I am not worth it.'
  - 'It is easy to say "Do not." Do you sup-

pose our feelings are so under control that we can master them at pleasure?' he retorted with bitterness. 'You let me hope, you hold the cup almost to my lips, and then tell me not to be sorry when it is dashed away. Who has been teaching you to play fast and loose, Bice? Who has shaken your faith in your friends? When will one of them do what I have done, what I am ready to do? Has your mother told you that she has borrowed money from me to pay her debts, because she did not doubt——'

He stopped. Bice had sprung up, pale, with flashing eyes.

- 'That is not true!' she cried.
- 'Is it not? Ask her.'

She looked at him as if she would pierce his soul. Alas, it is not always the most innocent souls which bear such looks without faltering! Her own eyes fell.

'I will pay it,' she said in a low voice.

- 'That is folly.'
- 'I will pay it,' she repeated, this time angrily.
- 'Do so,' he said after a moment's pause. And then he added, 'but remember this. If your mother had had from me a hundred times as much she would not have done me as much harm as you will do me if you throw me over.'

Was it true? Had she indeed worked all this evil? Would it not be easier to yield as she had meant to do that morning? He was so persistent, he would not give her up. She hesitated, and then, strong and clear, Phillis's words came back—'Do not marry him if you do not love him.' She looked him full in the face. 'Let me pass,' she said, 'I can give you no other answer.'

He had read something of the struggle, and was bitterly disappointed, though his determined will gave up nothing of his intention.

- 'If you write to Clive, it had better be without delay,' he said.
- 'I'll write to-morrow morning.' And then she turned and put out her hand. 'Thank you for letting me write, Oliver.'
- 'I dare not advise you to build upon it, but you can try,' he said. 'Yes, by all means try.'

The next morning, as Bice was passing through the hall, she met Trent.

- 'If you have any letters for the early post,' he said, 'I will take them, I am going into Florence.'
- 'Oh, thank you very much. I had meant to send little 'Tista.'
- 'Tista is wanted for the vintage, and is not an over-safe messenger. Is this all?'
- 'All. Thank you again. That letter is a weight off my mind. I am sure he will answer it.'
  - 'I fancy not, but, as I said, one can but

try. Nothing more? Rest in the garden, Bice, and do not go again to the vineyards. You look tired and pale. Such walks as yesterday do you no good.'

'Rest!' she repeated impatiently. 'You talk as if one could turn all the thoughts out of one's head whenever one liked. That might be rest.'

'I wish you would let me do your thinking for you.'

He spoke tenderly, and she turned suddenly and looked at him. He could not understand her look, which was at once inquiring and reproachful, and, indeed, at this time all her thoughts were in a tangle. Doubts, suspicions, generous impulses, womanly pride, womanly fears, seemed to shake her very soul, and drive it on one side and the other. Sometimes she felt as if she had not a friend in the world, as if the only haven open to her was one she loathed. Even with Phillis it was all a strange inexplicable problem. Phillis had brought her sharpest pangs, yet attracted her irresistibly. Phillis, too, was unhappy, of that she was certain; yet something about her, something which Bice felt without being able to explain, gave her a sense of rest and confidence. It was as if she had an anchor which must keep her from the tossing of such storms as were driving poor Bice here and there. Vague thoughts came floating about her, half prayers, half resolutions, feeble and fluttering, yet real and therefore not in vain.

## CHAPTER X.

## SANS PARTIR—ADIEU!

MISS CARTWRIGHT was really ill. And of all who loved and cared for her, there was not one who showed more affection than Cartouche. They had thought that he was only a puppy, that nothing in the world was so much to him as a run by the Arno or a frolic in the Cascine woods, but now, when his mistress was ill, he could not be coaxed to either the one or the other. He watched at her door, and, if he could get the chance, crept into her room, and looked at her with questioning, loving eyes. Once when the doctor came to her bed, to his alarm there rose up a black form from the other side,

growling angrily, and bent on resolute defence of his mistress. And another time they found that he had dragged together a heap of her shoes and slippers, over which he was keeping watch and ward. Phillis was a great deal with her, Miss Cartwright evidently liking the girl's companionship, and watching her as she sat at the window with wistful interest.

'My dear,' she said suddenly one day, 'this stupid illness of mine mustn't interfere with Jack's happiness. Remember, the wedding was to be at Florence, and, perhaps, if it had not been for me, it would all have been settled by this time.'

Phillis turned away her head as she answered—

- 'I don't think it can be so soon as you fancy.'
- 'But why?' Miss Cartwright persisted.
- 'On my account? Come, my dear, tell me

exactly whether that has not been on your mind and Jack's.'

'He has not spoken about it,' said the girl with an effort. 'Indeed, dear Miss Cartwright——'

'Call me Aunt Mary, my dear.'

'It can't be yet.'

Miss Cartwright said no more, she was hardly equal to any sustained conversation, but she took an opportunity later in the day to tell Jack that Phillis should go out for a walk. 'Take her to the Uffizi,' she said; and, Jack——'

'Yes.'

'Don't give me the sorrow of feeling that I am a hindrance. Let me hear that your marriage day is fixed.'

As she spoke he noticed with a pang how much she was altered, and with a sudden movement stooped down and kissed her. 'I would do anything in the world that could please you,' he said.

She held him fast with her feeble hands.

- 'My dear, she is worth much more than that,' she said eagerly. 'But I don't think you yet know how much, and I am sometimes afraid she will never let you know.'
- 'What do you mean?' he said, startled. But he could not get her to explain.

She had put into words what he had avoided forming into a definite idea. In his heart he knew that he ought to have spoken to Phillis about their wedding day, but it was so much more to his inclination that matters should go on as they had been going, that he had refused to think about the future. He had been out once or twice to the villa, and though Oliver was on guard, and though Bice showed the same reserve, it interested him to break through it, as he had once or twice succeeded in doing, and he was begin-

ning to take a dangerous pleasure in thwarting Oliver. However, he had spoken quite truly when he told his aunt that he would do anything in the world to give her pleasure, and he had no intention of avoiding the conversation with Phillis, only looking forward to it somewhat ruefully, as leading matters to a point which he would have preferred to regard for somewhile yet in the distance.

She was quite ready to go to the Uffizi when he suggested it, but asked to go round by the Duomo and Giotto's tower. The day was not very bright, but there was a still grave beauty about it. They went under the frowning walls of the Strozzi into the old market with its narrow, dirty, picturesque, unchanged alleys. Even when great bundles of yellow and scarlet tulips, fresh from the fields, and splendid in the glory of their colours, lie tossed upon the ground, or when

myriads of lilies of the valley are gathered into fragrant sheaves, this old market of Florence is not a place in which you can linger without some offence to eye or ear. And yet joy, too, were it only for these things, or for the sweet Madonna with her lilies which Luca della Robbia set up with faithful reverence for the buyers and sellers below. But in autumn days flowers do not deck Florence with the bounty of spring or summer. Vegetables there are in plentycucumbers, and scarlet tomatoes, and crisp white lettuces; and as for the fruits, they are heaped in great piles; melons—striped, smooth, small, large-lie under cool green leaves; rosy peaches, figs, purple and green, wild strawberries, grapes of every shade of delicious colour, brighten the old stones; but a certain grace has fled with the flowers, and Florence is not quite herself.

And yet on that day it was difficult to

think that anything was wanting, so tender were the lights, so soft the shadows, into and out of which—with here and there a rosy or a golden glow as a stronger gleam struck the marbles—rose the Duomo and the Shepherd's bell-tower. Phillis lingered there a little, lingered looking at the gates of the Baptistery, at Giotto's sculptures, at the little oratory of the Bigallo on the other side.

'There is so much, and it is all so close together!' she said, drawing a deep breath.

But, indeed, the wonder of Florence lies in her perpetual youth. She is old, and yet no touch of age seems to have passed over her. All around are the memories of past ages, but they are alive and present, and time scarcely seems to separate you from them. It would not surprise you to see Giotto standing under his tower, to meet Dante turning towards his house, Savonarola passing to the preaching, Romola—as real as

any—hurrying back to old Bardi. Our past grows mouldy, whereas here it keeps life, and colour, and reality. Is it that we are always trying to escape from it?

The Uffizi was rather empty. There were plenty of copyists, most of all, as usual, round the great Fra Angelico, with its praising angels, in the passage, but otherwise strangers were few. Jack, who had a craze for Botticelli, would not let Phillis rest until he had taken her to the Judith in the room next the Tribune. She comes towards you more lightly than Judith would have done after the deed, but the strong purpose, the self-forgetfulness of the face, are wonderful; and as the yellow morning light catches the grey blue of her dress, she looks far beyond you, and beyond what you are ever likely to Presently from her lips will come the cry of deliverance, 'Open, open now the gates!' and all Bethulia will press round to see and hear. Jack, who had learnt Botticelli from Ruskin, was full of enthusiasm, and dragged Phillis off to the Calumny, the Fortitude. He made her sit down in a corner where she could see the last-named well, and then a thought struck him.

'Your face isn't unlike Sandro's favourite type, Phillis,' he said, looking at her critically.

She coloured slightly as she smiled.

- 'Except for the far-away look, this Fortitude hardly seems to me to be one of that type.'
- 'You have that far-away look occasionally: you sometimes meet me with it. What are you thinking about?—our future?'
  - 'Of the future, perhaps.'
  - 'Ours, then.'

Phillis was silent. The Fortitude seemed to gaze at her with sympathetic eyes. Jack went on gravely and a little awkwardly.

- 'It is time we settled something, don't you think so?'
  - 'Yes,' she said in a very low voice.
- 'My aunt is exceedingly anxious that we should not delay on account of her illness, and I don't see that we need. We are both resolved that our wedding shall be as quiet and simple as possible, and really it will be a relief to her mind rather than an anxiety. Therefore, dear, only one thing remains—to fix the day.'

He did not look at Phillis as he spoke, and two people who glanced into the room thought the pair were a brother and sister bent on enjoying pictures which nobody in his senses could admire. Phillis said after a momentary pause—

- 'I am afraid that is not all.'
- 'Trousseau, and that sort of thing? But surely it can wait for England?'
  - 'Something of more consequence,' and he

noticed a tremor in her voice. 'Jack,' she went on, 'you and I have always been good friends. I hope that will go on; I don't think I could bear to believe that anything could come between us in that. But for the other matter, dear, it has been a mistake, and I thank God that there is yet time to set it right. We are good friends always, remember, but we can be nothing more. I was wrong to consent, and my uncle was wrong to press it, as I think now he did; but he did it for the best, and, as I said, it can be set right.'

'Phillis!'

She put up her hand.

'Hush! Spare me any reproaches or entreaties, Jack. If I have done wrong, I will take all the blame, and do my best to set matters right. I hesitated for a time because I thought of Hetherton, but I feel almost sure that if I write to my aunt and explain

how this is entirely my own doing, Mr. Thornton's sense of justice will prevail, and that you will not suffer. But even should it be otherwise, we dare not make that the first consideration, dare we? I am certain that would be your decision.'

'About Hetherton, yes,' said Ibbetson, rising and standing by her chair with much agitation. 'But I don't understand you, Phillis! Have you changed or I? What have I done to bring you to such a conclusion? You can't be thinking of all that your words imply. Are you offended with me?'

Her eyes, clear and steadfast, answered him, though her voice was shaken.

'Not offended. Offence could hardly come between us. But don't you see, we should not be happy together, we could not marry.'

'You could not be happy with me.

manner, there was a quiet resolution which for ever upset these preconceived ideas. This was no shy unformed girl, but a woman strong in her self-respect and self-control. 'Phillis,' he said, and there was greater warmth in his tone than he had ever shown her before, 'for pity's sake don't let a vague fancy separate us. If you say nothing definite, how can I defend myself?'

He half expected her to answer that she did not accuse him; but she did not, although she seemed to ponder over his words.

- 'It is not a vague fancy,' she said presently, and she spoke very quietly and sadly; 'it is a conviction, which you will by-and-by acknowledge yourself.'
- 'But—it is impossible—you don't really mean that it is all over between us? What reason can we give the Leytons—my uncle?'
  - 'I will explain to both.'

He walked away from her to the other

side of the room, standing staring at a picture of Signorelli's without seeing it. She sat where he had left her, feeling as if she could not move, as if her own hands had wrecked her peace, as if for the moment she would give all she had to undo what she had done. And it was not over yet, though her strength failed as he left her side. He came back quickly.

'Have you really considered the bearings of the case? Hetherton, for instance?'

'I am very sorry for you,' she said faintly.
'How sorry I cannot say. But there is no one nearer. I think Mr. Thornton must retract his words when he hears that this has been my doing.'

'But what will be your own position?'

Jack said with a certain effort.

She looked at him in bewilderment for a minute; then, as his meaning flashed on her, started to her feet. The tears sprang into her eyes, her voice trembled, but all her strength had come back.

have not deserved that,' she said vehemently. No, indeed. In this great crash of hope of happiness which she had brought about, Hetherton might go without so much as a thought. It was a hundred times more to Ibbetson, who salved the soreness of his independence with the idea that he was indifferent, but who could scarcely enter into the trouble his words had caused her. he, then, thought so meanly of her as to suppose that Hetherton had weighed? Oh, well that she had spoken, at whatever cost of pain! She began to walk away quickly through the rooms, and he, who had been startled out of another misconception, followed, feeling himself awkwardly placed as he did He kept close behind, but did not join her until they were near the bottom of the great staircase, and then she had recovered her composure, and made some indifferent

remark about asking for letters at the post office opposite. If you wish to change a conversation in Florence, there are plenty of sights and sounds which will effect your purpose. They chose a packet of the little photographs which are spread out under the arcades, turned as usual to look at the flowerlike tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, and stared in at the windows of the mosaic workers. When they reached the Old Bridge a soldier's funeral was crossing it, and the people crowding. The regiment marched, the sun shone out for a moment on flashing steel and on young grave faces; behind came a group of the black and hooded Brothers of Mercy carrying lighted torches. They were all walking quickly, and the Old Bridge formed a strange mediæval framework to the procession.

Ibbetson and Phillis dreaded silence too much not to make valiant efforts to avoid it all the way home by the Lung' Arno. It seemed to her that her forces were expended, and he was thinking uneasily of what she had said. His good things had dropped so readily upon him all his life long, that although she did not know it, nothing stimulated him like difficulty, and she had already gained a new value in his eyes, and moved him to a greater appreciation. But he was also annoyed and a little ashamed. Did she really mean that she was rejecting him? When they reached Casa Giulia he paused at the door.

'Phillis,' he said in a low voice, 'you said more than you meant just now, didn't you?'

She might have answered that it had cost her too much to say what she did to allow of her falling into such an error, and the pleading which he put into his voice made this appeal a fresh anguish. But she steadied herself to answer quietly—

'I mean it all. Indeed, it is best.'

'If you will not consent to our marriage taking place as soon as was intended, you don't at all events wish that everything should be at an end between us?'

'Are things ever at an end in this world?' she said, with a sad little smile. 'But I do wish that all should be at an end so far that you—that we should be absolutely free.'

'Am I to go away?' he asked petulantly. It seemed as if in this conversation their usual parts were reversed, and perhaps she read in it a sign that her decision was right. But now she hesitated. For herself she would rather he had gone, but there was Miss Cartwright, there was Bice. She said—

'I don't see how you can. And as we are always to be friends, there is no need.'

He said no more. He opened the door for her to go in, betook himself to the garden, and was as cross for the rest of the day as it was in his nature to be.

## CHAPTER XI.

## WHAT A WOMAN WILL DO.

In the villa Bice was suffering the dreariness of suspense, for Clive did not answer her letter, into which she had poured a heart full of longing. At first she was positive, in spite of the delay, that it was only a delay and no more. Once she turned sharply upon Oliver.

- 'You are certain that you posted the letter?'
- 'I was particularly careful of it, because I knew it was of consequence to you,' he answered, looking full in her face.
  - 'Then of course there is some good

reason for our not hearing, and I dare say something will come in a day or two.'

But nothing did come. The days went on, the girl's heart sank lower and lower in spite of her resolute words. If Clive bore that appeal in silence, things must be bad indeed, and perhaps there was but one way out of them.

Yet she did not yield. Oliver tried all the persuasions he could think of, and could not be sure that he had gained one step. She avoided him when she could, but if he forced her to listen to him, listened coldly, and answered that she must hear from Clive. He began to feel as if the puppets he was playing with were turning to flesh and blood avengers in his hands. She was asking for proof, and if she sought for it much more persistently, what might not start up in its place? He was tormented by jealousies, not only of Jack, who came up once or twice,

and seemed moody and out of spirits, but of young Moroni, who made no secret of his devotion. Bice was kinder to him than she had ever been before, and the poor lad, not knowing that she used him as a defence against another, had his head pretty well turned. Oliver was man enough of the world to read her motives, but if he had seen them written in large letters, he would not have felt easy. He hated the young fellow with his smiles, his sudden pathetic melancholies, his sweet Italian, which he could not understand. It seemed to him that they had a hundred interests in common, from each of which he was shut out. Out on the terrace. late at night, Giovanni would sit thrumming his guitar, the girls would sing. Trent had no part to play in it all. Another time he would find Bice and Kitty sitting on the edge of the water tank, Moroni in a fig tree below them, tossing the ripe fruit into their laps, old Andrea, half hidden by leaves, munching away at a little distance. Oliver. when he came up, seemed to have no place or welcome, except perhaps from Kitty. would ask himself angrily, why he lingered? what fascination there was for him in this proud, wilful girl? Yet, as he asked the question, he knew quite well that one glance of her beautiful eyes was enough to bind him to her side. He felt no remorse at the deception he was practising, or the pain he inflicted; neither pain nor deception seemed to him worth weighing for a moment against his determination to win her. What he did feel was annoyance at having to leave again with his work yet undone. It was necessary that he should return to England, and all his strong will as yet had failed to bind Bice, as he had never doubted she would by this time have been bound.

What then? Before he could return,

would John Ibbetson have flung over his love and turned to Beatrice? Would young Moroni have touched the girl's heart by his foolish youth, his sentimental songs? Would his own crooked dealings about Clive come to light when he was not present to turn the truth into a lie? Trent set his teeth savagely as he thought of these chances which must all be dared, since go he must.

He did his best to provide against them. He threw out hints, which he knew would make their mark upon Bice's impulsive, generous little soul, of Phillis Grey's desolate position in the world, and of her love for the man she was to marry. Moroni was an Italian, and when he was not present he did not really fear him. As for Clive, he had a long talk with Bice, in which he avoided pressing his suit, and so managed to reawaken some of her gratitude. Never had he been nearer winning her than he was that

day. He was kind, sympathetic, wise. He advised her strongly not again to press upon Clive, or even so much as allude to, her knowledge of his difficulties. If she did it, he asked her to send the letter to him, that he might be aware of her writing and act upon it. But he implored her for the present to leave the matter absolutely in his hands, since interference might make it very difficult for him to act; while left alone, he had the strongest hopes of arranging everything. He led her to suppose that it was for this he was going home; and he very skilfully managed alike to abstain from hinting at any reward, and yet to leave upon her mind an impression that he really considered her to have pledged herself. He let it be fully understood that he should return, if not before they moved to Rome in November, at any rate so as to join them there.

And having taken these precautions,

which, to his unquiet spirit, seemed miserably inadequate, he very reluctantly departed.

Bice expected to find his going a great relief. She was disappointed because an immediate lightness of spirit was not the result. What else—when she knew he was going to do his utmost for Clive—should make her listless and languid? Why did all that was going on at the podere seem utterly uninteresting and dry? Giovanni, who used to look daggers at the English signore, came over full of rejoicing that he was got rid of, full of plans and ideas for pleasant festivities; but for all the good that the young fellow got out of his deliverance, Oliver might have stayed on, for Bice could not be roused to any excitement, and indeed scarcely gave him a word in answer, though the simple and honest lad deserved better treatment; and every now and then she hated herself when she saw the pain which gathered in his eyes.

That was a time of which she could never bear to think in later days; and yet, poor child, there was a struggle, a contest going on, of which better people need not have been ashamed. She felt hurt and shamefaced in her own eyes, but she was loyal to the impulse which had led her to Phillis, to the kiss which had passed between them. Jack's manner, or an intuitive quickness, or newly-awakened perceptions of her own, somehow made her aware that things were not quite right between them. As for him, he was at that point which sometimes comes in a man's life, when a very little thing might turn him either way. He was dazzled and attracted by the girl's rare beauty, piqued by Phillis's rejection, and yet something made him seem nearer to Phillis than ever he had been before. It is possible that with a little effort Bice might have turned the scale, but she never made it; rather more than once her

grave, clear eyes had looked at him with a sort of reproach.

Miss Cartwright was better, though far from strong. She had grown so fond of Phillis that they feared the effect upon her of hearing that the engagement was off; but she listened in silence, scarcely alluding to it after the first, but, if possible, more tender than ever both to Phillis and to Jack. It pained her so greatly when Miss Preston said some sharp words about Jack's conduct, that her friend was startled into silence; and as she clung to Phillis, and needed her kind and patient nursing, it fell out that Phillis was at the house as much as ever, and, to all outward seeming, things went on just as they had gone before.

If this caused a great strain upon the girl, no one was likely to notice it. Mrs. Leyton had found pleasant friends in Florence, and though very good-natured in all she said to

Phillis on the matter of her engagement, was equally taken up with fifty other things, and content to let all the fifty and one go their own way so long as they did not clash with her comfort. Phillis herself had never been taught to consider her own feelings as paramount, or she might have been tempted to fly. As it was, she looked forward to Rome with eagerness as a place of escape, and then heard to her dismay that the doctor had pronounced Florence too cold for Miss Cartwright to remain the winter, and that she was to follow them to Rome as soon as she could bear the journey. Surely Jack at least would return to England! But this he had evidently no intention of doing.

Mr. Thornton's letters took the line of disbelief. He ignored the fact that the engagement was broken, advising them to get over their small misunderstandings as quickly as possible, if they wished their

friends to credit them with any grains of good sense. There was a kind of rough and ready philosophy about his letters under which Jack winced, while he did his best to keep Phillis from reading them. Jack was greatly interested in Phillis at this time, although he was hurt and annoyed with her. The fact was, she was so kind and unassuming that it was generally taken for granted that she would never fail at a pinch, and Mr. Thornton's indignation at the letters she had written to her aunt was as great as if his quietest horse had kicked him over. 'She object! She be the one to give herself airs! Don't let me hear any more of this nonsense, Harriet! Write and tell her to hold her tongue and be thankful.' And, indeed, although it was not acknowledged so roughly even to himself, Ibbetson, too, could not quite get over his The young fellow was not conwonder. ceited enough to believe that any girl in the

world would have him, but Phillis—to whom he had been accustomed all his life—he was unprepared to hear her say that they would not be happy together! She had grown to have a more separate existence since that assertion than she ever had in his eyes before. He was not sorry to be at liberty, but he was certainly annoyed that she should also have desired to claim her own.

The Leytons were to go slowly to Rome, by Perugia and Assisi, but early November arrived before they started, and two or three days before setting off, Phillis surprised them by asking Miss Preston to drive with her to Villa Carlina. She wanted to wish them good-bye, she said, and though some one suggested they would soon meet at Rome, she persisted.

- 'And may I not come, too?' said Jack, when he put them into the carriage.
  - 'Not to-day,' Phillis said, smiling; 'we

are going for a gossip, and you would be very much in the way. But Cartouche is breaking his heart for a hunt among the canes, and that is the best thing that you and he can do this afternoon.'

'A dog, indeed!' he said, turning away with some pretended indignation.

And then they began to make their way up towards the villa. It was a grey and windy day, and every now and then the wind blew a misty rain full in their faces, and turned all the grey olive trees into a shivering whiteness of underleaf. The vineyards were stripped and bare. A poor little kid, which had lost its mother, leapt on a bit of desolate rock and bleated piteously. Miss Preston blamed the climate of Italy, as if England were unacquainted with rain or mist. A great deal of rain had fallen, so that the road between the white walls as they climbed higher up was washed as if by a torrent, and

a number of loose stones had been brought Before they quite reached the gate of the villa, they came upon a little crowd, in the midst of which stood Bice, pouring indignant reproaches upon the driver of an ox-cart and upon two or three men and boys who stood by looking ashamed and downcast. One of the poor oxen had fallen, and instead of unfastening the cart and relieving the creature of the yoke which pressed it to the ground, they had set to work to belabour it about its head, using oaths and curses plentifully at the same time. Unluckily for them, the young padrona was within hearing, and as it was well known among the contadini that nothing made her so angry as ill-usage of the animals, there was great dismay in their hearts.

'Cara signorina!' one of them began humbly, but she stopped him at once with flashing eyes.

'I go to the *podere* myself this very day, and see that you do no more work there,' she exclaimed vehemently. 'You can go back at once, for little 'Tista shall take these poor beasts. If you have no shame as men for your cruelty, at least you shall find another farm for yourselves.'

Phillis could almost have smiled at the abashed looks of the men before the young indignant princess, whose sway no one seemed to dispute. The girl herself showed no discomposure at being found in this character. She gave her orders to 'Tista, directed that time should be given to the trembling creature to recover itself, and then, still pale with anger, came towards the carriage.

'When they are cruel like that, I hate the Italians,' she said, without any other explanation, as she put out her hand.

'There should be a society formed,' Miss

Preston suggested eagerly. 'Let me put down your names, and I will see about it to-morrow. A society for the protection of animals—the idea is admirable.'

'Oh, societies! There may be one for anything I know,' said the girl wearily. 'There is no law behind it, that is the drawback. Are you come to spend the day? That is kind of you.'

But Phillis explained it was only an hour they had come to spend. 'And when we have seen Mrs. Masters, will you let Kitty show Miss Preston the great cellars where you store your wine? she does not feel quite satisfied about the vintage yet.'

It was not difficult for Miss Grey to find some further excuse for getting Bice alone. She had not seen the upper storey of the house, where there were great bare-looking bedrooms and sitting-rooms, a studio, laundries, all sorts of places. The girls' room had a wonderful carved marble bas-relief over the fireplace, and a charming ceiling, bright and fantastic, but otherwise all the furniture was old and the greater part shabby. Phillis glanced at it with little attention; there was something she wanted to say, and she was not quick at turning a conversation to a desired point. It was Bice who unconsciously led to it. 'When we are in Rome,' she had said, and then she looked quickly at Phillis—'But then you will be married?' she said in a low voice.

Phillis thought she was prepared, and yet at the words the colour rushed up to the roots of her hair.

'That is at an end,' she said very hurriedly. 'We are not going to marry. It was settled before anyone had thought enough about it, and thinking has made us change our minds. Forget that you ever heard that it was to be.'

How fast her heart beat! How stiffly the syllables seemed to issue from her mouth. And yet she had meant to tell her quietly and calmly, to use quite different words. There was a silence in which the wind drove the loose branch of some creeper against the window, and in which Bice looked at Phillis.

She looked and smiled. Strange to say, at this moment she was the most composed of the two, and Phillis was deeply mortified that it should be so. But all that Bice said was—

- 'That is a pity. But I don't suppose I shall be able to forget.'
- 'It is not a pity if it saves either of us from unhappiness,' said Phillis, with much earnestness.
- 'Oh, I hope you will never be unhappy. It is so very miserable,' Bice said, dropping her hands with a little gesture of despair.

Her change of expression seemed to put

them again into their right positions. Phillis, who had been annoyed at her own agitation and at the incredulous manner of the other girl, felt her pity, her sympathy growing up again as warm as ever. If Bice and Jack loved each other, as was surely the case, then she would not shrink. She smiled in her turn, but looked steadily out of the window.

'There are many sorts of unhappiness,' she said gently. 'Some come so quietly that we have time to prepare and almost change their nature. And others are like sharp and sudden storms which seem to sweep us away, but are soon over, and then the skies are as smiling again as ever.'

'They are all hateful, whether they are of one sort or another,' said Bice in the same tone. 'I never believed the books which said they were anything else, and I think you have been reading those books.'

- 'No,' said Phillis firmly, 'I don't believe they are all hateful. And it is something different from books which you and I shall have to teach us that.'
  - 'What?'
- 'Never mind, you will tell me one of these days. Now shall we go down, and will you order the little carriage?'

As they went out, two or three bronzed men were standing outside the door. Andrea had come up his steps and was haranguing them, but when they saw Beatrice they started forward and poured out a torrent of words. Phillis could not understand the rapid patois, but there were tears in their eyes, and they were evidently imploring, entreating. Bice listened coldly; once or twice she said something at which they redoubled their protestations. When finally she yielded, one of them, the chief spokesman, stepped forward, caught her hand, and kissed it

fervently. It was like a scene of another age, Phillis thought, the young girl and the men watching her as if she had been a queen.

- 'I think perhaps they will behave better to the oxen for a little while,' Bice said, as they went away in delight.
  - 'How much they care for you!'
- 'They care for the work, too; it is of great consequence in these bad times. But they are very faithful and affectionate, poor fellows!'

Miss Preston shook her head. She told Phillis as she drove home that Bice's weakness in forgiving the *contadini* had convinced her that no woman should enter on the prerogative of her rights before the age of thirty years, when it might be considered that her judgment would be matured, and Phillis, who was pale and rather silent, did not attempt to contradict her. Miss Preston

having her own views about Jack's conduct very strongly outlined, glanced at her.

'Nothing can be worse for those two young girls than the sort of undisciplined life they lead, with a mother absolutely without energy or character,' she said decidedly. 'If I had remained here I might have been of some service to them, if one ever can be of service to wilful girls. But in these days it is almost hopeless.'

'Bice is most lovable,' said Phillis eagerly.

'I don't think it has spoilt her one bit.

Besides, what can be more simple than their life?'

'Oh, simple, I dare say!' Miss Preston said darkly. 'You have had very little experience of the world, my dear.'

'I suppose so,' said Phillis smiling.
'When people say that, one never knows what to answer. When does the experience come, I wonder; and what makes the world?

Is it anything very different from what one lives in every day?'

Miss Preston found it difficult to define, and looked shocked.

'You will know better one day,' she said, falling back on a generality. But Phillis would not be baffled.

'Will it help one to understand, do you think, and not bring new puzzles?' she asked, still smiling. 'It seems to me now, as if every experience brought something strange instead of making the old clearer.'

Miss Preston looked at her helplessly, and then put her head out of window.

'I never saw such a climate!' she exclaimed angrily. 'Raining when we started, and now quite fine. I am sure I trust we may find more consistent weather in Rome.'

## CHAPTER XII.

'ONE AND ONE, WITH A SHADOWY THIRD.'

Ir Florence has not forgotten her past, Rome has kept hers yet more faithfully, or rather has had a mightier one to keep. It is no longer the life of a few centuries back in which you move, Guelf and Ghibelline flaunting their battlements in your face; artist, sculptor, poet, working their lives out for the beautiful and ungrateful city—but an older age. The stones of the Republic are before your eyes, the road of triumph is under your feet. There, in the Forum, the great twin brethren watered their horses after the battle; hard by the martyrs were given to the lions. Look where you will, there is something which, as

you recognise it, brings a thrill to your heart, stirs an interest deeper than Florence can excite, and binds you to Rome for ever. No other city in the world resembles her. In Egypt you are taken back yet further; in Athens, memories of scarcely smaller interest cluster round the golden stones; but they have only their past, while Rome is alive, acting, carrying on her history, many-sided; appealing to the present, to the future—stern, grey, sunshiny, brilliant, all at once.

Something of this sort had been said by one of a little party of people who were strolling about the Palatine Hill one December afternoon, and Mrs. Leyton opposed it altogether on behalf of Florence.

'As to age, it is merely a comparative matter,' she announced. 'I don't feel very aged myself, but I heard a chit at the table d'hôte yesterday speak of somebody as 'quite old, oh, about thirty.' It all depends upon

the point from which you look at it. And I do think it is a shame to run down that beautiful Florence, about which you all pretended to be so enthusiastic when you were there, because some of these old stones of Rome have been set up for a few hundred years longer.'

Jack Ibbetson, who had been reconnoitring, came back.

'Run—hide yourselves—be quick!' he said anxiously. 'Miss Preston is coming this way with a victim.'

'It is Phillis who must be hidden then. I believe you and I have taught her to avoid us, but I am getting vexed with Phillis for the patience with which she listens to long archæological discussions which don't interest her in the least.'

'But they do,' protested Phillis, laughing.

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'Nonsense, my dear. It is your amiability and not your intellect which is brought into play. Now I consider amiability on such occasions an absolute wrong to your fellow-creatures—I do, indeed. All isn't gold that glitters, and even your virtues are not quite such unmixed blessings as I should like to find them. I hope you appreciate the sting of my remark.'

'It is taken out by your charity in crediting virtues which don't exist. But if only you would listen to poor Miss Preston, you would discover that she has a great deal of really curious information to give you.'

'I like my ignorance a great deal better, thank you. There she goes. I see the last flutter of that steel-grey robe disappearing behind the aloes. Mr. Ibbetson, you may come out and talk freely. How does dear Miss Cartwright get on in Rome? Is it true that the Masters came yesterday?'

'I believe so—yes,' said Jack shortly. He felt an odd sort of shrinking from Bice's name when Phillis was present, and yet Phillis had herself constantly led to the subject. Mrs. Leyton, who could not bear displeasing people, and saw he was unwilling to speak, skilfully dropped the topic.

'Then they will join us in some of this sight-seeing, which weighs like lead on my conscience,' she said lightly. 'Poor Harry makes a Moloch of his sketching, and I am sure the things which have to be seen are quite as serious for me. When I have done them all, I shall begin to enjoy Rome; but I give you notice, good people, not till then.'

Phillis laughed without contradicting her, or asserting a different opinion. Phillis herself, if there were any difference in her, had grown more silent and more reserved in. these last few weeks, going about a good deal alone, though never unwilling to join the others in their plans. She and the Leytons

were at a hotel; Miss Cartwright had taken apartments in the Via della Croce for the sake of Cartouche, who could not be expected to conform to hotel existence. Jack Ibbetson spent a great deal of his time with the Leytons. Phillis did not know how to escape from this life, which was full at once of sweetness and pain, pain sometimes almost unendurable. She rather sought other friends, and there were a brother and sister at the hotel whom she liked and who often joined them. They had expected the Peningtons to meet them at the Palatine, but they did not come, and by-and-by they all strolled down towards the Coliseum. A carriage overtook them, jolting over the Via Sacra, and somebody called out and waved. was Bice.

'How pretty Miss Masters looked!' said Mrs. Leyton, glancing a little curiously at Jack.

'We shall find them at the Coliseum,' said her husband, and he was right.

If Bice was looking pretty, she was changed, changed even since they had left Florence. Her eyes were bright and large, but they had dark lines under them; the round cheek had lost something of its sweet young curve; a pathetic appeal every now and then touched you in her voice. But she had not lost her decision. It was she who had brought Mrs. Masters and Kitty. She was eager, interested, wanting to know everything, only Phillis could answer half her questions. Mrs. Masters went back before long and sat in the carriage, the others climbed hither and thither, under the great arches, tier above tier. It is like climbing centuries and ages to mount those great steps, worn by many feet. The sun beats down upon them all, untempered now by the silken awning which used to stretch across the

vast expanse. Where the Vestal Virgins sat, delicate plants spring from between the stones, maiden hair waves softly in remembrance. And as you go up, and the great area discloses itself, its greatness, its might, its majesty, its silence, will touch you, if you let them, with an awful power. Rome lies before you, clothed in purple and regal shadows; the Campagna stretches away towards surrounding hills; black cypresses point; all about you the solemn arches frame some picture which belongs to the world's history; all about you the lights float, golden, rose, flashing into dark corners, and marked out by keen shadows.

Phillis stole away by herself, but she found that Bice soon followed her, and as if she were seeking occasion for saying something. And, indeed, she was too impetuous long to keep back anything she had to say. She caught Phillis's hand and dragged her to

a great block of travertine, where they were out of hearing of the others, and from which they could see Santa Maria Maggiore glowing in the sunlight, and roofs stretching away into blue distance.

'Sit there,' she said imperatively. 'Oh, I have wanted to see you! I am very, very miserable.'

'What has happened?'

People's sympathy is as different as people are themselves. Phillis's was very delicate and gentle—it seemed to ask for nothing, and yet to give just what was wanted. Tones and looks had more to do with it than words. Bice lifted her heavy wistful eyes to hers with satisfaction.

'Nothing has happened,' she said, 'and that is the worst part of it all, don't you think? If only one could set up one's trouble before one, quite distinct and alive,

there would be a chance of fighting it, of coming to the end somehow.'

She clenched her little hand as she spoke, and a fire came into her eyes.

- 'Perhaps,' said Phillis, smiling and looking at the beautiful face, 'it is better for most of us that our anxieties don't take quite such a definite shape. Suppose they should be too strong for us?'
  - 'Then there would be an end that way.'
    Phillis changed her tone.
- 'I don't think we are wise in wishing troubles to be stronger than they are,' she said gravely. 'As it is, I fancy they are as much as we can manage.'
- 'I don't mind fighting; it is the waiting,' said Bice with a little perverseness. 'Why are women expected to be able to endure? Is it because they have the hardest work and the least credit always?'
  - 'You can tell me something more as to

what is making you unhappy,' said Phillis, evading the question. 'Has your brother himself written to you?'

- 'Yes, he has.'
- 'And are things going on no better?'
- 'You shall see for yourself,' said the girl with a sudden resolve. And she produced a letter from her pocket. 'The first part is nothing,' she said, leaning on her hand and looking over Phillis's shoulder. 'There, begin there.'

'Trent has been awfully useful to me,' the letter said. 'I don't know however I should have got through without him. It's not much use trying to explain, particularly to anyone who doesn't know the sort of life one has to live here; and I suppose a good lot of fellows buy their experience much in the same way as I've bought it, but that doesn't prevent one's seeing when one has made a fool of oneself. I expected by this

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- 'And are things going on no better?'
- 'You shall see for yourself,' said the girl with a sudden resolve. And she produced a letter from her pocket. 'The first part is nothing,' she said, leaning on her hand and looking over Phillis's shoulder. 'There, begin there.'

'Trent has been awfully useful to me,' the letter said. 'I don't know however I should have got through without him. It's not much use trying to explain, particularly to anyone who doesn't know the sort of life one has to live here; and I suppose a good lot of fellows buy their experience much in the same way as I've bought it, but that doesn't prevent one's seeing when one has made a fool of oneself. I expected by this

time I should have been able to do something for old Kitty and you all. Better luck soon; I don't owe any money to a soul except Trent. You'll be glad to hear he has got it all into his own hands, and, of course, I feel pounds more comfortable. By the way, he says he has done it for you, and that I may tell you so.'

'Well?' said Bice, taking back the letter. Phillis was considering. The letter was boyish and inexperienced, but there was a tone about it which did not seem to her that of a young fellow who had entered on a course of crime, and her distrust of Oliver Trent had never abated. Yet what could she say? She had no real grounds for her opinion. She could not utter any word of warning which should touch Clive in his security. Yet with this conviction of hers growing in her heart, it would be impossible for a woman of Phillis's nature not to do

something or other by-and-by. She contented herself at present by saying—

'Poor fellow! No doubt he has been imprudent.'

Bice started. She had been thinking of herself rather than Clive, and considering the weight of those words which sounded to her almost like a threat. What was it that Oliver had done for her of which he desired her to be reminded?'

'Imprudent, yes! Weak and wicked too,' she said impatiently. 'He does not care or even remember that others have to suffer besides himself.'

'Perhaps he does not know.'

'Oh, that is impossible. Oliver, at least, would have spoken plainly. And has he not had my letter?' Her voice quivered a little as she went on. 'Phillis—I don't know—I think I could do something dreadful for people if they wanted it, but then it is hard,

isn't it, if they don't take any notice? Perhaps one shouldn't care about that, but I do. If Clive would only say straight out, "I have done something bad, but I know you'll not give me up," and then if he said "God bless you, Bice," afterwards, why—one could bear—bear anything.'

- 'Bice,' said Phillis, looking at her.
- 'What?'
- 'You haven't told me all.'
- 'Not quite,' she said reluctantly. 'I don't like telling, or even thinking; but you know I am very miserable.'
  - 'Has Mr. Trent got you to promise?'
- 'How could I help it?' she said, drooping her head. 'He did so much. It was like a network all round. Even mamma, poor mamma, she is so poor, you know, and he was kind—but I had things, I did manage that.' She had mechanically raised her hand to her throat as she spoke, and

Phillis noticed that a slender gold chain which she generally wore was gone, and that she had neither earrings nor any bit of jewelry about her. 'I couldn't do anything for Clive, it was like a horrible nightmare, and what would have become of him but for Oliver? When this last letter came, another came too from Oliver, telling me a great deal. It did not seem worth while to make so much fuss about oneself, and so—I wrote and promised.'

The tone in which she said those last words told much, and perhaps Phillis had herself had experience of that state of mind. She bent over and kissed her.

'Oh, my dear,' she said brokenly, 'but you shouldn't, you shouldn't have done it!'

'It is done,' said the girl, clasping her hands round her knees, and looking out towards the old basilica with its domes. But Phillis saw there were tears in her eyes.

- 'Write and undo it,' she urged.
- 'No; I wouldn't be so ungrateful for worlds. And at any rate it seems as if it would make him happy.'

Phillis felt no satisfaction at this prospect. She was full of pity, yet almost angry with this young creature who was throwing away her own happiness, and, alas! other people's too. Was this to be the end of what Phillis herself had done?—was no good to come out of her own pain? She hushed the cry of her heart almost angrily. 'He did not love me, he did not love me,' she said to herself, 'and this makes no difference. Only I hoped he would have been happy.'

Perhaps Bice felt that she could bear no more, for she jumped up.

'I have not heard their voices for a long while,' she said. 'They can't have gone without us! Or suppose we find the great iron door at the bottom shut?'

'Oh, there's a bell. We shall see some one.'

Down on a lower tier they found Jack waiting. He explained that Mrs. Leyton and Kitty had driven back with Mrs. Masters, Captain Leyton was sketching the Arch of Constantine.

'And I am to see you home, if you'll allow me. Are you cold? It's not the most prudent thing in the world to sit about in the Coliseum, with all that water below you.'

'No, it was very foolish,' said Phillis, looking with compunction at Bice's pale face. 'Are you sure you are not chilled? Let us set off at once.'

'But you yourself?' said Jack, in a low voice.

Something in his tone made her flush crimson, and then she hated herself for having done so. 'As if I had not already suffered enough for such foolish imaginings!' she thought reproachfully.

It was an odd sort of walk home for all of them, and would have been more uncomfortable but that the things around gave ready subjects for conversation. After the Arch of Titus and the Forum there are dirty, shelving, picturesque streets, noble fronts of old temples half buried in the earth, curiosity shops full of ancient and begrimed lamps of all graceful forms, of which, if you look long enough, you may one day light upon the manufactory. Grey oxen come stumbling along over the slippery lava pavement; very likely a Capuchin monk, brown and dirty, vanishes round a corner; the streets fall away for Adrian's forum and the great pillar, and close up again until you come to the piazza of the Apostoli. It was there the Capponis lived with whom the Masters were staying. The palazzo was

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not so large or imposing as its neighbours; such as it was it was too big for its owners' fortunes, and they let half of it to some English, consoling themselves by preserving a separate entrance and cordially despising their rich tenants. Phillis thought it looked very grey and gloomy as Bice stood for a moment in the entrance, and yet the girl's loveliness struck them both. Perhaps it was partly the delightful charm of youth, and its contrast with the grim buildings; perhaps it was that the talk with Phillis, or the walk home, had brought a rosy flush into her cheeks, a bright light into her eyes. moment she was like the Hebe Jack had discovered on the hill-side behind Florence.

But, for all that, he would not have spoken of her to Phillis unless Phillis had begun the subject, having an uneasy consciousness that here lay the key to the mystery of his rejection. The way in which this rejection

haunted him astonished himself. He allowed that he had been piqued, but there is little doubt that he fancied the pique would have spent itself, and left him free; instead of which he could not shake off the vexation and the annoyance. As often as not he was angry with Phillis, and, but that he was a gentleman, would have shown it. As it was, he often perplexed her, and such a tête-à-tête as they were having now she avoided simply from the pain it caused herself. She was one of those people who try to do what is right with a brave disregard for the pain which may be a necessary part, but she did not go out of her way to court it. Only today she had a purpose, and it must be carried out in the few narrow and crowded streets which lay between them and the Condotti.

'If I were a man,' she said thoughtfully, 'I should like to do something for that poor child.'

- 'A man,' repeated Jack. 'Is it man in the abstract, or any particular man who is needed?'
- 'Well, he must be particular because he must be ready to take some trouble, and when the trouble is taken he must have wits to use its results, otherwise he might be as abstract as you please.'
- 'Is it this wretched brother who has come to the fore again?'
- 'I have a theory that he is not so wretched as we take for granted. I dare say he has been foolish.'
- 'Oh, that's an epidemic we have all gone through,' said Ibbetson; and Phillis felt suddenly hot, though nothing was further from his thoughts than an allusion to their engagement. She said hurriedly—
- 'The evidence of anything worse is very vague. That Mr. Trent never enters into details, he gives mysterious hints, and im-

presses them all with an idea of his own great efforts, but that is all.'

'The tone in which you say "that Mr. Trent" speaks volumes for your opinion,' said Jack laughing. 'But didn't you tell me she had written?'

'Yes. Still—Mr. Trent posted the letter.'

Jack gave a low whistle.

'You are coming it rather strong in your suspicions, Phillis,' he said doubtfully. 'What motive could he have? It would take a big one.'

'He wishes to marry her,' said Phillis, looking straight before her.

'But she does not like him?'

Jack put the question with evident eagerness. They had just turned into that open space which the Fountain of Trevi seems to fill with the glad rush of its waters. Clear streams leap from twenty different points;

there is a confusion, a harmony, a most invigorating freshness in the silvery flashes. Phillis stood still for a moment, looking at them with her hand on a low wall which the spray had wetted. It seemed to her as if his question meant something quite different, as if he would have said, 'Does she not like me a little?'-as if her hand must open the door between two hearts. Alas! but was there not a third which she herself was shutting out? She did not hesitate, but she was conscious of a feeling that it was hard on her that this, too, should be left for her to do. And what of Bice's last confidence? As she turned and looked at Jack, did he guess what faithfulness, what kindness were shining in those clear brown eyes?

'I am sure she does not like him,' she said. 'But I fear—'

'What?'

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- 'I fear that he is using unfair means to bind her to him.'
- 'But what can be done?' he asked as they walked on again. 'Suppose, for instance, that I became the particular man to whom you alluded, what should you do it you were in my place? We have arrived at a complete labyrinth of suppositions, but still—supposing?'
- 'I should go to England, and trace the matter out.'
- 'Very direct and decided, Phillis,' said Jack with a smile. Christian names had, of course, been used between them all their lives, and it would have been impossible to break off the custom; but still, as if by common consent, they did not use them more often than was necessary, and it seemed to Phillis as if he need not have brought hers in now, still less lingered slightly upon it. 'Well—it's hard to send me out of Rome, but if the

fellow is what you take him to be, there would be a certain pleasure in baffling him, and one could but try.'

'Yes, I think so,' she said quietly. There was no need for her to thank him for what must be a grateful task, and she did not attempt it. Nor would she ask him questions as to his going. Perhaps Ibbetson expected something of one sort or the other, but the bells of Sant' Andrea began to clash in their brick belfry overhead, and the Peningtons came rushing out of a side street from which they had caught a glimpse of Phillis. Penington was small, plump and bright-eved: her brother a clergyman of thirty, shortsighted, energetic, and quick in all his movements, with a sweet kind smile. As they all walked together through the Piazza di Spagna by the pretty jewellers' shops towards the Alemagna, Phillis would have been very much astonished had any one told her that

Jack, whose natural disposition was certainly peaceable, felt a far stronger aversion to Mr. Penington than to Oliver Trent, against whom he was going to open a campaign.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## IN THE VATICAN.

As Phillis passed out from the table d'hôte at the Alemagna that evening, the porter put a note into her hand.

'Get me what information you can,' it said, 'address, name of firm, and anything you think useful. And, for pity's sake, don't let my aunt and Cartouche be completely flattened by that woman in my absence.'

The next morning a note went to the Via della Croce.

'The information is simply wonderful.

The firm is "Thornton and Hay." I do think
it is the oddest coincidence!'

For 'Thornton,' the senior of the two

great iron-masters, was Peter Thornton of Hetherton Court, of whom mention has been made; and, under the circumstances, Phillis's astonishment was not to be wondered at. Quite a fire of notes passed between the two streets that morning. The next was to this effect:

'Very queer, indeed. If I were you, I would say nothing of this to his sister.

Where are you going to-day?'

An answer came back.

'To the Vatican with the Peningtons. I send you an order in case you like to bring the Masters.'

Mr. Penington was an excellent cicerone. His information was trustworthy, and he had that pleasant way of imparting it which never gives you the impression of mounting a pedestal and declaiming. Phillis thought her afternoon delightful, and it seemed as if he thought the same, for he claimed her interest

eagerly. They were in the hall of the Muses, standing before the beautiful and stern Thalia, who sits with a garland of ivy leaves on her head, looking out disdainfully at the world's follies, when Mr. Penington touched Phillis.

'The most lovely girl imaginable has just come in,' he said; 'you must really get a good view of her.'

It was Bice, of course. She was walking listlessly before her companions, and scarcely troubling herself to glance at the statues; but she brightened at seeing Phillis, and seemed relieved to join her. Phillis would have liked to tell her what errand was taking Jack to England, but she could not venture to do so, and indeed Mr. Penington, who had no intention of allowing his companion's interest to wander, managed to claim her whole No one noticed the indignant attention. glances which Jack threw at him. Phillis would have been the last to conceive that he

could be annoyed at another engrossing her, and perhaps he himself would have scarcely allowed that Bice's beautiful face could have less attraction for him than Phillis's brown eves. As it was, he was thoroughly angry at what he liked to think of as Phillis's fickleness, and by way of retaliation devoted himself with all his might to Bice. It seems sometimes as if the world was made up of cross-purposes, when we see the mistakes, the unintentional wounds that are inflicted. People observe things which never existed, and shut their eyes to what lies plain before them, and long afterwards, perhaps, look back with a sigh at their own work. What should we do, all of us, if we were left with nothing better than to make the best we could of our tangles!

Poor Bice! All sorts of fancies went rushing through her heart that afternoon, as Jack strolled along by her side as he had

done in the first days of their acquaintancepassionate longings and regrets, wonder and impatience. How had Phillis and he been separated, how had Oliver and she come together? Why did Jack talk kindly, and ask questions as if he cared? For the girl was not deceived, only troubled, and there was a bitter revolt in her heart against her fate, sometimes a yearning for Jack's sympathy, sometimes a fierce suspicion that all this time he might have read her secret and despised her. She was not in a mood to look at the white statues, it made her shiver to see them by her side, cold and changeless, and she would not pretend an interest she did not feel. When they came to a great brazier, full of grey or glowing embers, she stretched out her little hands to the warmth. while Ibbetson glanced at her with unmistakable admiration in his eyes.

'When first I knew you, I could not

picture you in anything but a white dress,' he said in a leisurely tone.

'Don't talk of it,' and she shuddered.
'If ever one wants warmth and colour it is in a sculpture gallery. I wouldn't come here in white on the hottest day of the year.' She was looking before her as she spoke with that fixed mechanical gaze with which people look at something they do not really see. Suddenly she started and caught Jack's arm. 'Oh, look, look!' she cried in a terrified undertone.

He could feel her fingers trembling on his arm, and instinctively laid his own hand upon them with a strong firm clasp. The touch brought her to herself, for she withdrew her hand instantly, colouring crimson as she did so, but not removing her eyes from the object which had alarmed her. Ibbetson turned hastily to look where they were fixed.

'What was it? What frightened you?' he asked gently, looking at her again, for nothing that he could see accounted for her evident terror.

She drew a deep breath.

- 'Who is that man standing with his back towards us on the right?' she said in a quick low voice. 'There, do you see?'
- 'I see, but it's no one I know. Whom do you take him for?'
- 'Are you sure you don't know him? I begin to think now that I was mistaken,' she said with such evident relief that Ibbetson smiled.
- 'I hope you are not generally so shocked at seeing an acquaintance unexpectedly? Would you like to come a little closer and make sure of the matter?'
- 'Yes—I think so,' she said with some hesitation. 'But not too near.'
  - 'Oh, we'll beware of the ghost,' said Jack

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'When first I knew you, I could not

confidently and kindly. He was still feeling the clinging touch of those little fingers on his arm, and there was a warm impulse of kindness towards her stirring in his heart, as well as a little curiosity as to what likeness had so moved her. She stood still before they had gone many yards.

'No, no, it is not,' she said hurriedly, 'I see quite well now. It was very foolish of me.'

'Better look in his face and get the idea quite out of your head,' persisted Ibbetson. 'Otherwise those sorts of notions are apt to prove uncomfortable.'

She did not resist. They passed the gentleman and saw his full face, but beyond saying that she did not know how she could have been so mistaken, she did not attempt to explain her terror, and no resemblance to Mr. Trent struck Jack so as to give him the clue.

Still, real or fancied, the alarm had evidently shaken the girl. She said she

would go back to Mrs. Masters, who had placed her camp-stool near a brazier, and remained calmly indifferent to the art treasures about her, so long as she could keep warm and avoid fatigue.

- 'Don't let me detain you from the others,' Bice said, when they had reached her mother.
- 'The others don't want me,' answered Jack in a voice which had some irritation in it. 'That fellow Penington is at it, speechifying away like mad.'
- 'Óh, do you mean he isn't nice?' asked Bice so innocently that the young man laughed in spite of himself.
- 'I don't know that there's much harm in him,' he allowed, 'but I dislike to have guide-book information crammed down my throat second-hand. Never mind them. Do you know that I am going away?'

## 'No.'

Though she hated herself, she felt the

colour leaving her face. And she could not ask when or where.

- 'But I am. I am off to London.'
- 'Do you come back here?'
- 'Well, I hope so, certainly. The only thing likely to stand in the way is a lawsuit in which they sought my services, and I don't mind confiding to you that the odds are rather against that supposition.'

More than one person had certain fancies of theirs confirmed that afternoon. One went and came like the dull tick of a great clock in Phillis Grey's brain as she sat in her bedroom late at night. 'He—loves—her,—he—loves—her,' was what it said with persistent effort. She had sent him away, and though no one suspected it of her, her heart was sometimes nearly breaking.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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